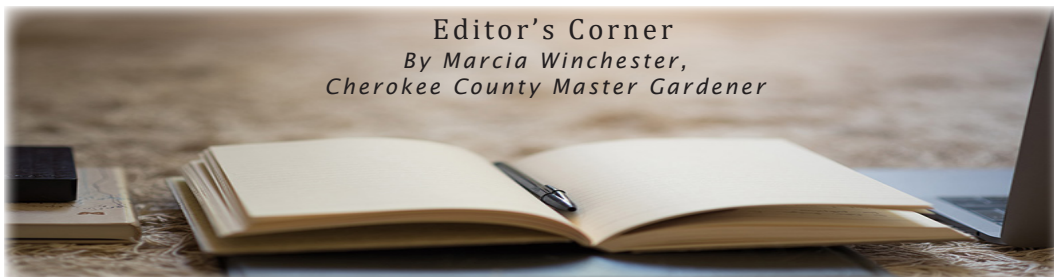


Gardening With The Masters

Growing, Gardening and Gaining Knowledge
December 2023/January 2024

Ilex vomitoria



Editor's Corner
By Marcia Winchester,
Cherokee County Master Gardener



(*Tiarella cordifolia*) foamflower blooms
Lindley Ashline [CC BY-NC 2.0](#)

Buying a new plant is always exciting. There is the anticipation that will it perform as well as promised. Will the neighbors be in awe of it? Will the deer and other wildlife not bother it? One of my primary hopes is that my new plant will be well behaved.

Unfortunately, most experienced gardeners will tell you about their failures. The tomato looked great but had thick skin and poor flavor, the lovely annual wilted in our hot summer sun, the new ground cover seemingly grew out of the bed overnight, smothering favorite plants along the way.

I hate it when I find myself having to dig out and toss a plant that is so aggressive it takes over the garden. Early on I started a log of plants not to buy.

I learned to read between the lines of the description on the plant tag where "spreads easily" means "beware!" I also learned to research plants offered for free before I planted them. It takes longer to eradicate a thug than to plant it!

Some plants can be aggressive at reseeding. I've found that there are two ways to handle these plants. First is to "deadhead" or cut the seed heads off before the seeds mature or ripen. I do this with foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*) and with hellebores (*Helleborus orientalis*). I love these plants, but they can become overwhelming. Every few years I let the foamflowers reseed to fill in spots where I want them. Then there are the years I miss clipping the hellebore seeds off in time, so I let the resulting plants mature and donate them to our Master Gardener plant sales.

Another fun way to deal with an abundance of seeds is to share them. Everyone loves trying new plants in the garden, and starting plants from seed is the perfect way to do this, as well as being economical. Just be a good friend by warning anyone if the plant reseeds aggressively!



(*Helleborus orientalis*) flower close-up
Jim Robbins [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#)



Hellebore seedlings courtesy Marcia Winchester



Happy Holidays
from all the
Cherokee County
Master Gardeners

Enjoy your holidays and
we hope to see you soon!

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Marcia

Tricksters of the Bird World: Mimids

By Mary Tucker, Cherokee County Master Gardener

When is a bluebird not a bluebird? When it's a northern mockingbird pretending to be a bluebird! Yes, I was totally fooled one time. I heard what was surely a bluebird, but when I spotted the singer, it was a trickster of a mockingbird.

Northern mockingbirds are indeed named for their astonishing vocal mimicry, as evidenced by both the common name and the scientific name, *Mimus polyglottos*, which translates into "many-tongued mimic." Even the name of the avian family they are in, the Mimidae (or mimid family), reflects this trait. In addition to mimicking other bird's songs, these avian songsters also have a wide repertoire of vocalizations beyond what we think of as "song."



Northern mockingbird © Jay McGowan | Macaulay Library



Brown thrasher © Nathan Dubrow | Macaulay Library

Over thirty species are included in the Mimidae family, and all are found only in the Western Hemisphere. In Cherokee County, Georgia, in addition to the northern mockingbird, you will find Georgia's own state bird, the brown thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*), and the gray catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*).

These three species have some traits in common beyond their mimicry, but they also have their own individual characteristics, which we'll examine below.



Gray catbird © Wilfred Hdex | flickr

Appearance

Each of Georgia's mimids has a long tail in relation to the body length, and they tend to hold the tail cocked upward. Coloring, markings, and size will let you tell one species from another.

The mockingbird is a slim bird that is a medium gray with a lighter gray chest. The wings have accents of black in addition to white wingbars that are especially visible in flight. In addition, the tail is edged in white. The bird's overall length is about 9 to 10 inches.

The thrasher is the largest of the three species at 11 to 12 inches in length. It is a rich reddish brown with a breast that is coarsely streaked in brown and white. The bill is long and curved, and the adult has a distinctive yellow eye.

The gray catbird is indeed a uniform slate gray as its common name suggests. The most distinguishing features include a black cap on the head and a rusty patch of feathers under the tail. It is the smallest of Georgia's mimids at 8 to 9 inches in length.

Vocalizations

Though Georgia's three mimids are related and have somewhat similar songs, if you listen closely, you can usually tell which of the three is vocalizing.

The northern mockingbird tends to repeat phrases of birdsong several times, usually in three to six repetitions. It then moves on to a different tune. Mockingbirds are known for singing even late into the night, and it is often the unmated males that do this serenading. Of the three species, the mockingbird is most likely to give an excellent imitation of another bird's song. You may even hear it imitate insects or frogs.

In contrast to the mockingbird, the brown thrasher usually repeats song phrases only two times before it changes tunes, stringing the songs together into a long vocalization. Calls also include sharp or raspy chipping, clucking, hissing, or whistling sounds.

The gray catbird's sounds are typically not repeated and are more random and more raspy or nasal in tone. These sounds may include whistles, chattering, and almost mechanical sounds. They are also well known for their characteristic "mew," hence the common name, and this vocalization really can sound remarkably like a cat!

Embracing the Joy of Christmas and the Environment with Children

By Barbara Schirmer, Cherokee County Master Gardener

The Christmas holidays present a wonderful opportunity to engage with children and instill in them a love and appreciation for the environment. By combining the magic of the festive season with activities that promote sustainability, we can create cherished memories while teaching valuable lessons about our planet. The following are various eco-friendly activities to enjoy with children, contributing to their overall development and fostering a sustainable mindset.

1. Crafting with Natural Materials:

Encourage children to get creative by making Christmas decorations from natural materials like pinecones, leaves, and twigs. Engaging in this activity not only stimulates their imagination but also teaches them the value of repurposing items, such as those found in nature. Moreover, it serves as a reminder of our responsibility to protect the environment and conserve its resources.



Crafting with natural materials courtesy CANVA

2. Creating Eco-friendly Wrapping:

Embrace the spirit of sustainability by involving children in the process of eco-friendly gift wrapping. Encourage them to use recyclable materials such as brown paper, old newspapers, or fabric. Decorating these materials with eco-friendly dyes or paint can make each gift unique and environmentally conscious, setting a positive example for future generations.



Photo courtesy CANVA

3. Visiting Local Farms or Markets:

Take children on trips to local farms or farmers markets during the Christmas season. Engaging in this hands-on experience allows them to understand the importance of supporting local agriculture and consuming seasonal produce. It also fosters a connection to nature, helping children comprehend where their food comes from and promoting healthy eating habits.

4. Planting Christmas Trees:

Instead of purchasing a cut Christmas tree, opt for a young, potted or live tree that can be planted after the holiday season. Involve children in selecting and planting the tree, and encourage them to care for it throughout the year. This activity not only reduces the environmental impact of tree harvesting but also instills a sense of responsibility towards nature.

5. Nature Walks and Scavenger Hunts:

Set out on nature walks or scavenger hunts in nearby parks, forests, or even your own backyard. Encourage children to observe and appreciate the beauty of nature as they search for specific items or learn about different plants and animals. This activity promotes environmental awareness, fosters a love for the outdoors, and provides an opportunity for physical exercise.

Engage children in volunteer work related to environmental causes during the Christmas holidays. Participate in local environmental clean-up initiatives, tree-planting programs, or wildlife conservation activities. This hands-on involvement not only contributes positively to the community but also instills in children a sense of responsibility towards the environment.

The Christmas holidays offer a precious chance to not only celebrate the season's joy but also to teach children about the importance of enjoying and preserving the environment. By engaging in activities such as we have outlined above, we can inspire children to have a sustainable mindset. Let us embrace the magic of the season while nurturing a love for our planet and its well-being in the hearts of our children.

Raccoons in the Garden

By Karen Garland, Cherokee County Master Gardener

The name “raccoon” comes from the Algonquin Indian word arakunem (pronounced ah-rah-KOO-nem), which means “he who scratches with his hands.” These nocturnal masked bandits are active year round and are particularly visible in the winter. They adjust to living near humans and are easily observed in various outdoor settings. Neighborhoods, parks, swamps, and other forested areas are suitable habitats for raccoons. They will settle in for good with only a few requirements: fresh water, food, and shelter in the form of large hardwood trees, cavities, culverts, or even spaces under houses.

Raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) are small mammals that weigh 11 to 33 pounds and are about 2 to 3 feet in length. They have distinct black “masks” on their faces, often characterizing them as bandits. They have fluffy ringed tails, and their bodies are varying shades of gray, with hints of light brown. The forepaws of raccoons resemble tiny human hands with five toes, making these creatures very dexterous. In fact, functioning much like the hands of a person (excluding the opposable thumb), these forepaws make it possible for these inquisitive animals to gain entry into human containers and storage areas that are off-limits to other species.



Photo raccoons courtesy UGA

In December or January, a male will leave his territory to search for a mate. The female is quite particular about who she will mate with and will accept only one male per season. Cubs are usually born in March or April. They are about 4 inches at birth, with an average litter containing four or five cubs. The eyes of the newborns do not open until they are three weeks old. If the mother senses a threat to her young, she will carry each cub to a more protected den space. Almost seven weeks pass before the cubs venture out of the den.

Raccoon mothers are fiercely protective and will attack any threat to their young. People and dogs are the primary threats, but bobcats, great horned owls, panthers, and coyotes will also prey on unwary raccoons. The raccoon’s first line of defense is to climb a tree, and the mother will hoist the cubs up onto a limb before they learn to climb by themselves.

Mothers teach their young how and what to forage. Primarily nocturnal feeders, raccoons are omnivores and prefer small mammals, birds, eggs, grasshoppers, crickets, fruits, nuts, seeds, acorns, and a variety of planted crops such as corn, tomatoes, and melons. They are infamous for their clever ways of getting into garbage cans, frequently spreading the contents hither and yon. Therefore, ensure your outside cans are secure with tight-fitting, locking lids. If you have a trash can that doesn’t have a locking mechanism, you can rig it with bungee cords to strap down the lid.

Despite the myth, raccoons do not wash their food before they eat it. Have you ever dipped your cookies in milk? Do you eat your cereal with milk poured over it? Raccoons, like people, have specific ways they eat particular food. Dipping food in water probably developed because the water makes the food easier to chew and swallow, as the raccoon has a very narrow gullet.

Because they can carry the rabies virus, many people are concerned about raccoons living nearby. Any raccoon showing signs of sickness or aggression should be reported to the proper animal control authorities in our area. Even raccoons that appear to be healthy are still wild and must be treated as such.

It is never a good idea to feed any wild mammals. Handouts of food will lure the animals to change their behaviors, as well as their diet. Wild animals that appear cute and cuddly can quickly become a nuisance or even dangerous. Non-human species have adapted to respond to a set of stimuli that we, as humans, do not fully comprehend. Regardless of the human-like traits that we assign to animals, they will still behave in response to an inherent code most familiar to themselves.

Although you may not always see them, raccoons will undoubtedly leave behind some evidence of their visit, especially in the garden. These may include tracks, droppings, and crop damage. Various methods can be used to frighten these animals away—some of which include the use of radios, flashing lights, scarecrows, windmills, pie pans, etc. However, these only work briefly, if at all, as the raccoons will get used to them quickly. Nonetheless, there are still preventative measures you can take. For instance, simply cleaning up the surrounding area can help.



Beautiful Beech: The American Beechnut Tree

By Megan Hilf, Cherokee County Master Gardener

The American beechnut tree (*Fagus grandifolia*), also called red or white beech or just beech, is native to North America with a life span of 350 to 400 years. The tree is now confined to the eastern United States and southeastern Canada, but prior to the glacial period it was thought to extend as far west as California. The beechnut is a slow growing tree reaching average heights of 80 feet (maximum 120 feet) with a 70-foot densely rounded spread making it an excellent shade tree.



This tree has many distinguishing features but most impressive is the smooth silver-grayish colored bark. Sadly, the smooth bark does make it a target for carving initials and graffiti.

The beech tree can grow in full sun or part shade in USDA Hardiness Zones 3 to 9. It prefers rich moist soil that is well drained and slightly acidic. These trees are monoecious, having both male and female reproductive parts on the same tree.

Photo tree bark courtesy Meg Hilf

Leaves are 2 to 5 inches long and about 2 inches wide, hence the name *grandifolia*, meaning large leaves. The leaves cluster at the ends of the branches and have an elliptical/oblong shape with serrated edges. Leaves start out a silvery green in spring turning dark green and glossy in the summer and then a golden bronze in the fall.

Despite being deciduous, the dead leaves persist on the stems until the springtime, a process called marcescence. Other trees that hold on to their leaves include some oaks (*Quercus* spp.), witch hazel (*Hamamelis* spp.) and some members of the birch family (*Betulaceae*). The actual reason for this is not known but working theories include protection of buds from the harsh winter cold, preventing wildlife from nibbling on buds, and a way to provide fertilizer to the tree for early spring growth. Several studies have shown a higher nutritional content to the soil around the base of those trees dropping leaves in the spring as compared to those losing the leaves in the fall. Whether they are making their own compost or other factors are in play is just not known at this time.

Beechnut trees are relatively disease-free here in Georgia, but both Beechnut Bark Disease (BBD), first noted in 1930, and Beechnut Leaf Disease (BLD), recently recognized, are found in the northeastern areas of the country. BBD is caused by a non-native scale and fungus, and BLD is caused by a nematode. Both diseases will lead to the death of the tree.

There are other varieties of the beechnut in central Europe, Japan, and Mexico. The copper beech (*Fagus sylvatica* 'Purpurea' or *Fagus sylvatica* f. *purpurea*) has purple leaves that turn red in the fall. The tri-colored beech (*Fagus sylvatica* 'Purpurea Tricolor') has dark greenish bronze leaves with pink along the edges. The Japanese beech (*Fagus crenata*) can reach heights of 200 feet and is often used in bonsai gardening.

Another very distinguishing and environmentally important feature of the beech tree is the production of fruit-nuts. Nuts are not produced until the tree is nearly 40 years old. From that time on it will produce larger volumes every second or third year.



Photo tree form © Geneva Wirth and leaves © Katja Schulz courtesy NCSU.edu



Photo marcescent leaves courtesy Mary Tucker



Photo leaves and fruit © Jim Robbins NCSU.edu

Continued on page 7

Tricksters of the Bird World: Mimids...continued from page 2

Given the range of sounds that these birds make, I won't try to describe them for you any further. Instead, I suggest that you visit the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's All About Birds website (www.allaboutbirds.org) where you can listen to numerous recordings.

Diet

These birds tend to share a lot in common regarding their diet. In summer when insects are plentiful, that is their preference. They will dine on such creatures as grasshoppers, caterpillars, grubs, moths, and beetles. They may even consume small reptiles, such as snakes and lizards. The mimid species are also attracted to feeders if you offer mealworms or a suet mix, though in my experience, mockingbirds are a bit harder to attract to a feeder than are thrashers and catbirds. By the way, the thrasher's common name comes from its habit of sweeping its bill from side to side as it searches for insects in leaf litter.

In fall and winter, these three species adore fruits, such as the berries of holly, dogwood, serviceberry, elderberry, and beautyberry, just to name a few. So if you want to make your garden hospitable to these birds, include fruiting shrubs and trees, especially native species that these birds evolved with.

Habitat and Nesting

All three of these mimid species inhabit and nest in trees, shrubbery, hedgerows, and thickets. They often prefer dense vegetation so that their nests will be well hidden from predators. Keep this in mind if you want to add landscape plantings that will encourage these birds to nest in your yard.

Mockingbirds, thrashers, and catbirds all breed in Georgia and may have several broods each year, with as many as six eggs in a brood. Egg color varies by species, but all are in shades of light turquoise to pale blue with reddish brown speckles.

Migration

Though these three bird species all spend the summer in Cherokee County and breed here, they have somewhat different lifestyles the rest of the year.

Northern mockingbirds are true year-round residents and don't migrate. In fact, they inhabit all 48 contiguous states in our country and are therefore the most widespread of the three species. The term "northern" does not refer to its range in the United States but serves to distinguish it from a tropical species.

Brown thrashers breed throughout much of the eastern United States and up into southern Canada. The birds that breed farther north will migrate to the south for the winter. Therefore, the southeastern states have these birds year round.

Gray catbirds breed throughout much of the United States and into Canada. When cold weather arrives, the northern breeders move south to winter along the Gulf Coast and into Central America and the Caribbean. However, some of the birds are year-round residents along the Atlantic Coast. In our Woodstock yard, the catbirds generally arrive and leave on a schedule similar to that of the ruby-throated hummingbirds.

Visit www.allaboutbirds.org to see the migration maps of these three mimid species and to learn much more about these vocally entertaining birds.

Raccoons in the Garden ...continued from page 4

Removing places raccoons may den, such as woodpiles, overgrown shrubbery, and other debris, can help. Open structures should be closed in, perhaps with screening, and overhanging tree branches should be pruned back to prevent the animals from gaining access to nearby rooftops.

The persistence and proliferation of raccoons have inspired many other solutions; one of them may work for you.

- To keep raccoons at a distance, try scattering blood meal around corn plants. Also, try sprinkling wood ashes around your plants.
- Grind up garlic, mix it with an equal portion of chili powder, and spread it around the garden. Frequent applications are needed.
- Plant enough corn for man and beast alike.
- Add some pinwheels and streamers to your garden to scare the creatures.
- If your home is near your garden, remove any possible food sources from the area, including pet food and bird seed. Plant squash around your corn or other plants to deter raccoons; they don't like walking on the prickly squash vines.



Beautiful Beech: The American Beechnut Tree ..continued from page 5



Photo tree nuts courtesy
Meg Hilf

The nuts are in a highly recognizable spiny husk that ripens from September through October. Inside the husk are two to three triangular shaped nuts. These nuts are edible to humans, but it is recommended to only consume ripened nuts in small quantities. This is due to the fact that they contain a mild toxin, saponin glycoside, known to cause stomach upset. (I did try a nut from my tree and found it a bit too bitter for my taste!)

However, this does not stop the wildlife from enjoying this fruit. Many wildlife species find the rich and fatty beechnuts to be a wonderful food source. Creatures that feast on these nuts include deer, bear, opossum, numerous varieties of birds and game birds, and many small mammals. Passenger pigeons, prior to their extinction, were known to land in large flocks on these trees, consuming the nuts and often damaging the branches. The beech tree is also host for numerous species of moths, butterflies, and insects in Georgia. This insect population in turn attracts yet more birds.

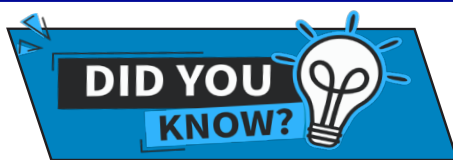
The Native Americans used the beech as a food source. In addition, they employed various parts of the tree for many different ailments, including soothing poison ivy, healing frost bite, treating skin disorders, controlling parasites, and treating gastrointestinal issues.

Early settlers were familiar with the beechnut as the European varieties of this tree were all over central Europe. The wood of the beech tree is very hard and burns slowly, making it a great fuel source for the settlers. They also made utensils from the wood and used the leaves for stuffing mattresses. The nuts were often ground, using the oil in various ways, and the ground nuts were used in baking. When the settlers arrived, there were huge forests of beechnut trees covering large parts of the Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana. They quickly realized the soil these trees were growing on was excellent for farming, and many forests were cleared.

It is believed in ancient times that the beech wood was cut in slabs, covered in wax, and used as a form of “tablet” on which the Romans wrote. Currently the beech wood is still used for making furniture and flooring. It is also useful for food containers as it does not affect taste. The wood is hard, very dense, and strong; however, it cannot handle continuous exposure to sunlight or areas of constant moisture. And, who has not heard of “beechwood aging” found on the labels of Anheuser-Busch bottles. The wood from the beech tree acts as natural fiber to allow for more contact between yeast and beer without affecting taste.

Just to round out the many facets of the beechnut tree, there is a lot of folklore and mythology surrounding it. Pieces of wood from this tree were often carried in the pockets as a talisman to bring good luck. The beechnut is thought to impart great wisdom and forward thinking. It was thought to symbolize the end/death of something and the birth of something new. It is often called the “Queen of the Forest” with the oak being the “King of the Forest.” Some ancient cultures believed that fairies lived in the tree, and if a branch fell in front of you, a wish would be granted if the fairy felt it was worthy.

The beech tree has much to offer and is a great tree to add to your landscape if you have the space. The tree’s ability to provide shade is wonderful, but do not expect turf grasses or other plants to grow under this beauty. If wildlife is what you seek, it will surely deliver once it starts to produce nuts. *Fagus grandifolia* is a true American beauty!



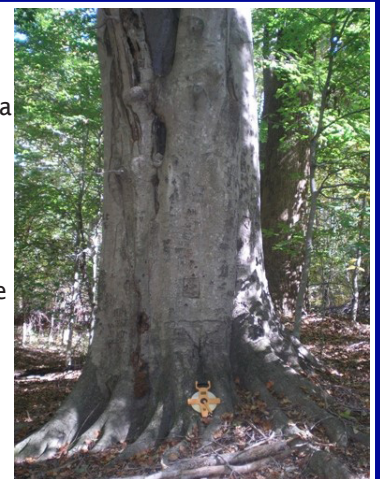
By Mary Tucker, Master Gardener

Did you know that the largest recorded American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*) in Georgia boasts a circumference of 169 feet, a height of 115 feet, and a crown of 91 feet? This makes it the “champion” of the species in the Georgia Forestry Commission’s Champion Tree Program, which recognizes and celebrates the state’s largest trees.

In this program, a champion tree is defined as the largest known tree of a particular species, and the tree must meet several criteria: the trunk must be at least 9.5 inches in circumference; the tree must be at least 13 feet in height; and the species must be either native or naturalized in the continental United States.

As noted in the article on the American beech in this newsletter, that species typically grows about 80 feet tall with a 70-foot spread. Georgia’s champion beech, found in Gwinnett County, well surpasses that, making it an exceptional example of one of our celebrated native trees.

For more about Georgia’s Champion Tree program, visit the Georgia Forestry Commission website at <https://gatrees.org/learn-explore/champion-trees/>.



American beech photo courtesy
Georgia Forestry Commission



DECEMBER GARDENING TIPS



Photo courtesy <https://ugaurbanag.com/growing-pansies/>

ORNAMENTALS

- December is a good month to replace overgrown shrubs - don't fertilize until early spring.
- Fertilize pansies and other winter annuals with a fertilizer containing nitrate nitrogen. The higher the ratio of nitrate nitrogen the better the fertilizer. **To know more about pansies click [HERE](#).**
- Finish winter clean-up by pruning deciduous perennials 3-4 inches from the ground. Leaving part of the stem helps mark the location and size of the plant. **For more pruning info, click [HERE](#).**
- When it is too cold to work in the yard, work on putting your landscape on paper; mark existing plants, site conditions (wet, dry, sunny, shade) then make a list of what you want to add. **For more info on landscape planning, click [HERE](#).**

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

- Top dress unused areas of veggie beds with 2-4 inches of composted manure or shredded leaves.
- Fruit trees can be pruned at any time during the winter provided the temperature is above 45°, **For more info on home orchard pruning click [HERE](#).**
- Get asparagus beds ready to plant when weather and soil conditions permit. The planting site should be in areas that will not interfere with cultivation of other crops. Bed preparation should include heavy applications of compost or aged animal manure plus 25 lbs of 6-12-12 per 1000 ft² applied broadcast. Till deeply and smooth soil surface. Set asparagus crowns any time in late December or early January when soil is not frozen.
- December is a good month to construct raised vegetable beds. Any length is fine but it's good to build them no wider than 30-40 inches for easy access and to minimize compacting soil. **For more raised bed info, click [HERE](#).**
- Pick mummied fruit off trees and rake up leaves under fruit trees to remove insects and diseases.
- To protect winter veggies from extreme cold, apply a thin layer of mulch or cover with a row cover. **For mulching info click [HERE](#).**

DECEMBER MISCELLANEOUS

- Keep all indoor plants away from drafts and direct heat sources - inexpensive plastic draft hoods help redirect heat away from plants. **For more info on houseplants and winter care, click [HERE](#).**
- Keep checking house plants for insect infestation. Isolate and treat infected plants immediately.
- Winterize your lawnmower, tiller and weed-eater. Drain out gas and replace the oil with fresh oil. Remove the oil filter and either clean or replace it. Check all nuts and bolts to be sure they haven't vibrated loose. Mower blades and tiller tines can be sharpened. Inspect wheels, belts and other moving parts.
- To keep your shears and loppers in good shape for next year, clean them with mineral spirits or Lysol bathroom tile cleaner. Adjust the tension screw and give them a good sharpening. Be sure to use a broad file while sharpening. Tools sharpened by a power grinder will overheat and lose their tempering, making the metal likely to chip or break.
- Clean garden hand tools with liquid detergent and bleach, drying thoroughly. Then oil to prevent rust.
- Blades of shovels and hoes can be sharpened with a file. Apply a light coat of household oil. Treat all wood handles with a coat of linseed oil.
- Drain garden hoses and sprinklers checking for leaks. Replace any old washers. Do not store hoses in direct sunlight or freezing temperatures as both will shorten the life of your hose.
- Clean all pressure sprayers and dusters before putting them away for the winter. Make sure they are functioning properly prior to storage.
- Clean and sanitize all stakes and trellises before putting them up for the winter. Use either rubbing alcohol or 1 part liquid bleach to 9 parts water.
- To prevent freezing, cover spigots with winter covers.



Photo raised bed at Encompass Ministries courtesy Gerald Phillips, Master Gardener



JANUARY GARDENING TIPS

ORNAMENTALS

- Watch for camellia buds that have brown spots on the edges and then spread to the entire flower. This is petal blight. Remove and destroy any buds showing symptoms. Don't confuse it with cold damage. It's a good practice to remove spent flowers from the ground. **For more info on camellia care click [HERE](#).**
- January is a good month to plant trees. Do not add fertilizer to planting hole - it could burn the roots. **For soil preparation and planting info click [HERE](#).**
- Fertilize annuals in colder months with a fertilizer high in nitrate nitrogen.
- Keep pansies and violas dead headed.
- If squirrels are digging bulbs, cover the bulbs with 1-inch wire mesh so foliage can grow through. Then place mulch over wire.
- Pull up winter weeds now before they form seeds.
- If a few, consecutive warm days have caused your bulbs to nose out from under protective mulch, plan to thicken the mulch layer as soon as cold weather returns to prevent freezing by exposure.
- Analyze last year's planting, fertilizing and spraying records. Make notations to reorder successful varieties.



UCA1436148
Camellia flower blight rapidly turns flowers brown. Bugwood.org


- Prune apple and pear trees. Remove dead limbs first, then the pencil-sized, vertical "water sprouts". **For a pruning and training factsheet click [HERE](#).**
- Sterilize tools, pots, and anything you use around your plants. Use one part household bleach to nine parts water. Soak for about 15 minutes, rinse well and let dry.

JANUARY MISCELLANEOUS

- Protect liquid insecticides from cold weather to preserve their effectiveness. If any product is stored below the manufacturer's suggested minimum storage temperature, it loses its potency. The most important factor in determining if the product is usable is the complete absence of crystals. If crystals remain after the product returns to room temperature, do not use it. Dispose of it according to the directions on the label.
- Chop unwanted kudzu, English ivy, and bamboo to the ground. Follow with herbicide on the new leaves in April.
- Clean indoor plant leaves with a damp rag. Sandwich the leaf between folds of cloth and wipe gently. Change the cloth for each plant to avoid transferring insects or diseases.
- Make sure houseplants are misted and not touching windows. Cut back on fertilizer except for plants you are trying to force to bloom. **For care on holiday and gift plants click [HERE](#).**

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

- Plant B & B, bare-root and container-grown fruit.
- Water newly planted fruit trees thoroughly, even if the ground is wet, so the soil around the roots will settle.
- Prune grapes in January or February. If this job is left too late in the season, bleeding from cut ends will occur. Train them onto a one or two wire fence. **For dormant grape pruning click [HERE](#).**
- Don't plant strawberries or figs until February or March. **For home gardening with strawberries click [HERE](#). For home gardening with figs click [HERE](#).**
- Some mail order seed companies offer pelleted seed of lettuce, carrot, and a few other small-seeded crops. Pelleted seed has a special coating to make them larger. This is especially valuable for children and gardeners with arthritic hands, weak eyesight, or poor coordination. Wide spacing of seed helps eliminate thinning.
- When using pelleted seed, plant in moist soil and keep it moist because the coating has to dissolve before the seed can germinate.
- Organize your seeds for inside planting. Take each seed packet and count back from the last frost (April 14) taking into consideration the number of days for germination.
- Remove brown raspberry and blackberry canes that bore fruit last year; tie up green canes for this year's fruit. **For more info click [HERE](#).**
- Spray dormant oil on fruit trees, per label instructions.

	RAINFALL COMPARISONS					
	Cherokee County			State Wide		
	Sept 2023	Oct 2023	YTD 2023	Sept 2023	Oct 2023	YTD 2023
Actual	1.2	0.8	43.9	0.9	2.3	40.6
Normal	4.1	3.7	46.1	3.6	3.0	43.4
Deviation	-2.9	-2.9	-2.2	-2.7	-0.7	-2.8

Recipes

Turkey Tetrizzini

Submitted by Mageeda Doe

This easy and tasty dish is a wonderful way to use leftover turkey.

Ingredients

Angel hair pasta (not a whole box)
1/2 stick butter
2 ribs of celery, diced
1 onion, chopped
1 can cream of mushroom soup
1 can cream of chicken soup
1-1/2 cans of chicken broth
2 cups grated cheddar cheese
1 large jar sliced mushrooms
4 cups of leftover turkey, cubed or cut in 1-inch pieces
Salt to taste
Grated Parmesan cheese and paprika

Instructions:

1. Prepare angel hair pasta according to package directions and set aside.
2. Sauté onion and celery in butter and place in large bowl.
3. Into the onion and celery, stir in the soups, broth, cheddar cheese, and mushrooms; mix in turkey, and season to taste with salt.
4. Place cooked and drained pasta in a greased 9" x 12" casserole dish; pour turkey mixture over the pasta.
5. Top with Parmesan cheese and paprika.
6. Bake at 350 degrees until bubbly.

Pumpkin Cheese Cake

Submitted by Mageeda Doe

This delicious pumpkin cheese cake is perfect for the holidays. Makes 8 servings.

Ingredients

2 cups finely crushed ginger snaps (Nabisco)
1/2 cup finely crushed pecans
8 Tbsp. butter, melted
3 pkgs. (8 oz. each) cream cheese, softened
1- 1/4 cups sugar, divided
1 tsp. vanilla
3 eggs
1 cup canned pumpkin
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/4 tsp. ground nutmeg
Dash of ground cloves

Instructions:

1. Mix ginger snap crumbs, pecans, and butter; press into bottom of a 9-inch springform pan, extending crust 2 inches up the sides.
2. Beat cream cheese, 1 cup sugar, and vanilla with electric mixer on medium speed until well blended.
3. Add eggs one at a time, mixing on low speed after each addition just until blended.
4. Reserve 1-1/2 cups of the plain batter; stir remaining 1/4 cup of sugar, pumpkin, and spices into remaining batter.
5. Spoon half of the pumpkin batter over crust; top with spoonfuls of half the reserved plain batter. Repeat layers.
6. Cut through batter with knife several times for marbled effect.
7. Bake at 325 degrees for 55 minutes or until center is almost set.



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EXTENSION
Cherokee County

<https://extension.uga.edu/county-offices/cherokee.html>

UGA Cooperative Extension—Cherokee County
1130 Bluffs Pkwy, Suite G49
Canton, GA 30114



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