

Gardening With The Masters

Growing, Gardening and Gaining Knowledge
February/March 2025



Come Grow With Us

Scan the QR Code above for detailed course descriptions and registration information. Also check out our flier on page 5 for more classes and education activities. See you soon!



Editor's Corner

By Marcia Winchester,
Cherokee County Master Gardener



Begonia propagation courtesy Mariana DiVita

For over 25 years, the Cherokee County Master Gardeners have put together a series of educational programs for the public. We are presenting our programs in four locations throughout the county. We have greatly expanded the selection at the Canton Senior Center. At Veterans Park, we are adding a large selection of programs at the new pavilion in the garden. Some will be offered at more than one location to be sure everyone can sign up to attend.

We continue to present popular programs on tomatoes, herbs, and container gardening. We've added programs on growing ginger and turmeric, cucurbits, and peppers. In our program on figs, you will take home cuttings for your own garden plus learn how to successfully grow them. In the begonia program you will learn how to propagate begonias and take some cuttings home. If you missed the potato program last year, it is being offered again. The popular program on hydrangeas is back with updated information.

Of course, our program on pollinators will again be held in conjunction with the multi-state Pollinator Census on August 23 in several locations. This is a great event for Scouts or home-schooled children as well as adults.

The various programs will be held at the following locations:

- ◆ Encompass Ministries, 6551 Commerce Parkway, Woodstock
- ◆ Canton Senior Center, 1001 Univeter Drive, Canton
- ◆ William G. Long Senior Center with Woodstock Parks & Recreation, 223 Arnold Mill Road, Woodstock
- ◆ "The Buzz" Ahrens Recreation Center at Veterans Park with Cherokee Recreation & Parks, 7345 Cumming Highway, Canton.

Go to our website (<https://cherokeemastergardeners.com/>) to view our flier with all our upcoming programs. Be sure to register for posted programs and keep an eye out as new programs become ready for sign-ups.

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Marcia

Dahlias: You Don't Know What You've Been Missing

By Mike Smith, Cherokee County Master Gardener

Why in the world am I writing about dahlias in the middle of winter??

The short answer is now is the time to be looking through all of those catalogs to see what you're going to plant this coming spring. The reputable sources quickly sell out of the popular varieties, even though they won't start shipping until spring.

Although dahlias (*Dahlia* spp.) can grow almost anywhere, they thrive in the warm, sunny conditions of Georgia. They prefer full sun to partial shade and well-drained soil. With a little care and attention, dahlias will reward you with an abundance of blooms from summer to fall.



Photo Dahlias courtesy Canva

Choosing the Right Dahlias for Georgia

There are almost 50 species of dahlias and over 50,000 different cultivars all having unique characteristics. When choosing dahlias for your Georgia garden, consider the following factors:

Climate: Dahlias are hardy in USDA Hardiness Zones 8 to 11. Georgia falls into Zones 7b to 8a, so you'll want to choose varieties that are heat tolerant.

Bloom Time: Dahlias bloom from summer to fall. If you want a long blooming season, choose varieties that bloom for an extended period.

Flower Size and Shape: Dahlias come in a wide range of flower sizes and shapes. From small 1-inch pompons to large 14-inch dinner plates, there is a dahlia to suit every taste.

Color: Dahlias come in almost every color of the rainbow, except true blue. You can mix and match colors to create a stunning display in your garden.

Planting and Caring for Dahlias

Dahlias are easy to grow from tubers. You can purchase tubers from a local nursery or from an online retailer.



Dahlia tubers courtesy Canva

Plant tubers in the spring after the last frost has passed. Dahlias prefer well-drained soil that is rich in organic matter. Amend your soil with compost or other organic matter before planting.

Dahlias need regular watering, especially during hot, dry weather. Water deeply and less frequently to encourage deep root growth. Mulching around the plants will help to conserve moisture and suppress weeds.

Dahlias benefit from fertilizing every few weeks during the growing season. Use a balanced fertilizer or one specifically formulated for dahlias.

Staking Dahlias

Dahlias with tall stems may need to be staked to prevent them from falling over. Stake the plants when they are about 12 inches tall. Use bamboo stakes or other sturdy supports.

Deadheading Dahlias

Deadheading, or removing spent blooms, will encourage dahlias to produce more flowers. Deadhead the flowers as soon as they fade.

Winterizing Dahlias

In the fall, after the first frost, dig up the dahlia tubers. Let the tubers dry out for a few days before storing them in a cool, dry place.



Dahlias with stakes in a garden setting courtesy Canva

Making Seed Tapes

By Linda Freedman, Cherokee County Master Gardener

Seed tapes are long strips of biodegradable paper in which pre-spaced seeds are embedded. In garden centers they are more expensive than just a packet of seeds, but you can make them yourself for a fraction of the cost.

Why use seed tapes? Well one of the biggest problems for gardeners, especially beginners, is the correct spacing of seeds, especially small seeds like carrots, lettuce, herbs, and some flowers. Using seed tapes will help correct this problem. Gardeners also tend to sow too many seeds, resulting in seed waste and the need to thin seedlings as they sprout and grow. Seed tapes make it easy to use the correct number of seeds and to space them most effectively.



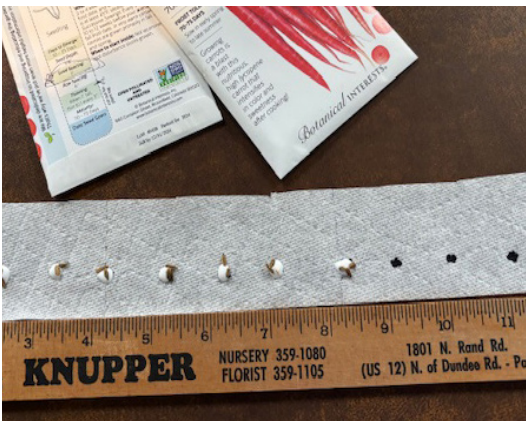
Photo courtesy UGA

In other words, a seed tape is a tool to help the gardener be more successful, plus making them is a fun and simple do-it-yourself project. You can make them in winter and store them until spring for planting or give them as gifts to other gardeners.

Supplies You Will Need:

- ♦ Paper towels or one-ply toilet paper. It will be easier for seeds to sprout through one-ply toilet paper.
- ♦ Scissors.
- ♦ Ball point pen or marker.
- ♦ Elmer's® glue. Use non-toxic glue, or make your own glue using 2 tablespoons of white flour and 1 tablespoon of water. Make sure the glue is not too watery.
- ♦ Ruler.
- ♦ Seeds.

Making Homemade Seed Tapes:



Cut strips of paper towels or toilet paper 1½ to 2 inches wide. Make as long as you want.

If you are using toilet paper and you only have two-ply, you must split the two layers.

Place a ruler on your strips, and mark spaces for seeds based on the directions on the seed packet. (Seed spacing instructions will be on the back of the seed packet)

Place a moderate sized dot of glue on each mark, and then place one or two seeds on the glue drop.

Using a toothpick may help to pick up the seeds.

Fold the top half of the paper towel or toilet paper over the bottom half and press lightly.

Using a pen, label one end of the strip with the name of the seed.

Leave the strip out to dry. This usually takes a couple of hours.

Roll up the seed tape and store it in an airtight container in a cool, dry location.

When it is time to plant, read the back of the seed packet to learn how deep your seeds need to be planted. A common mistake for first timers is planting too deep. Remember that some seeds, such as carrots, barely need to be covered. Make a small trench in the garden or raised bed at the correct depth. Place the tape in the trench, sprinkle with loose soil, and water as you would if sowing the seeds directly in the ground.



*Seed tape images courtesy Marcia Winchester

Small Yard? Think Layers!

By Carolyn Puckett, Cherokee County Master Gardener

A few years ago, I downsized from a one-acre-plus woodland garden to a plot under one-quarter acre. I now have sunny areas as well as shade, but very limited horizontal area for an ornamental garden. Nevertheless, I now have over 200 species of ornamental plants to satisfy my love of plants and to support our birds and insects. While you might not want 200 different species, if you are a plant lover with a small yard, consider vertical layers to accommodate more plants.

The layers available to your garden include the tree canopy, smaller trees, large and small shrubs, perennials, vines, and groundcovers. In this article, I will focus on trees and shrubs, with a separate article on perennials, vines, and groundcovers in the next issue.

Today, there are a great many tree and shrub cultivars that have been selected for their smaller-than-normal size, either shorter or narrower—way too many to list them all. While not all the plants you choose need be dwarf, I will share with you those that I have planted that have done well here. In selecting shrub species to plant, I primarily chose those that filled two purposes: evergreens to provide winter interest, and a number of native flowering and berrying shrubs to feed our native critters.

I selected my new home in an active-age-55-and-over community for its yard as much as for the floorplan. My property has a wooded wetland of a few acres on two sides, allowing me to “borrow” the woodland scenery I love (another tactic for small gardens). I also inherited a post oak tree (*Quercus stellata*), a sweet gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), and a river birch (*Betula nigra*) that act as my tree canopy. (If you plant only one canopy tree, an oak will support the most wildlife).



Front flower bed courtesy Carolyn Puckett



Native black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*) courtesy Carolyn Puckett

In addition, one of my favorite trees, the native black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*) grows in my backyard. This lovely tree is an attractive pyramidal shape, and while the flowers are very small, it still produces many blue berries for the birds in late summer. The berries never make a mess as the birds gobble them up first. Female trees berry the heaviest. The black gum is the first tree in autumn to display fiery red leaves, making it a favorite.

In the large bed immediately in front of my south-facing house, I kept three ‘Knockout’ roses (*Rosa* ‘Radrazz’) and added a native arrowwood viburnum (*Viburnum dentatum* ‘Blue Muffin’) and a non-native hydrangea (*Hydrangea paniculata* ‘Little Lime’).

For winter interest, I also planted three each of two dwarf evergreen native American arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis*) cultivars: reddish ‘Fire Chief’ and blue-green ‘Mr. Bowling Ball’.

The east edge of my property sports a deodar cedar (*Cedrus deodara*) and an Arizona cypress (*Hesperocyparis arizonica*) planted by the original owner, unfortunate choices for a small yard as they are now 40 feet tall and 30 feet wide. Because they provide shel-

ter for birds, I have reluctantly retained them. Always read the label of plants you buy to check on their mature size. Also, be aware that the size on the label is the size at 10 years growth; shrubs and trees often continue to grow even larger after that.



Winter interest with dwarf evergreens courtesy Carolyn Puckett

I kept previously established gardenias and added a native serviceberry (*Amelanchier* spp., also known as Juneberry) to the east side of the front yard. With white flowers in early spring, blue berries in summer, and colorful fall foliage, serviceberry is a lovely tree. (See photo page 6)

Building Better Raised Beds

By Nancy McCarthy, Cherokee County Master Gardener

Winter is the PLANNING time for most gardeners, so this winter you may want to consider building a raised bed for your vegetables before PLANTING time. Why make the extra work?? There are many advantages to using raised beds in your garden that make this extra task well worth your investment in time and materials. Here are just a few:

1. The main advantage a raised bed provides is the ability to control the quality of your soil. Not all of our local soil is ideal, and a raised bed allows you to add amendments and fertilizers as needed in a controlled area. You are the KING of your soil.
2. No more aching backs! If you elevate your garden bed, it reduces the need for bending and squatting... the bane of every gardener.
3. Make weeding a thing of the past. A well-established bed with solid borders eliminates the majority of those weedy culprits that invade your garden.
4. Avoid soil compaction and damaged fruits. No one is going to trod on your tomatoes or make a path through your bed.
5. Aesthetics. Don't forget the visual delight of a well-planned display of raised beds.



Raised bed building courtesy Marcia Winchester

There are many types of raised beds with even greater options for materials. Please consider the following when planning:

1. Materials – There is a wide range of materials available. Remember that a bed will need sturdy support to maintain the amount of soil in the bed. The list includes lumber, cement blocks, recycled building materials, etc. What is my budget?
2. Size – How large of a bed is needed? What is the recommended width and height?
3. Accessibility – Will the bed layout allow me to walk through the area if there are multiple beds or around the bed with a wheelbarrow or cart?
4. Site – Is this spot level, and does it receive a full 6 to 8 hours of sun?

To explore many of these options, please reserve your spot at the Cherokee County Master Gardener class **“BUILDING BETTER RAISED BEDS”** on Saturday, March 29, at Papa’s Pantry. You will need to register for this FREE class at: <https://cherokeemastergardeners.com/event/building-better-raised-beds/>

BUILDING BETTER RAISED BEDS

MARCH 29, 2025
10:00AM-11:00
PAPA'S PANTRY
6551 COMMERCE PARKWAY
WOODSTOCK 30189

JOIN US FOR A GATHERING TO HELP YOU PLAN THE SITING, LOGISTICS, AND MATERIALS YOU WILL NEED. DRESS WARM.

FREE! TO REGISTER VISIT
[HTTPS://CHEROKEEMASTERGARDENERS.COM/EVENT/BUILDING-BETTER-RAISED-BEDS/](https://cherokeemastergardeners.com/event/building-better-raised-beds/)

1

COME GROW WITH US

Master Gardener Plant Sales

Cherokee County Senior Services
1001 Univerter Rd. Canton

May 3 9:00-12:00

Fabulous selection of sun and shade plants, succulents, herbs, seeds, and hand tools

Sept 6 9:00-12:00

Fabulous selection of sun and shade plants, perennials, ginger lilies, cannas, seeds, hand tools, and bulbs

Have a plant or garden question? email the Master Gardener Helpdesk at: info@cherokeemastergardeners.com



An Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, Veteran, Disability Institution
*If you are an individual with a disability who may require assistance or accommodation in order to participate in or receive the benefit of service, program, or activity of UGA, please contact us.

Contact us:

UGA Extension—Cherokee County
1130 Bluffs Parkway Suite G45
Canton, GA 30114
770/771-7803
Scan for Homepage:



2025 Program Partners



2025 Educational Programs



Woodstock Area

Encompass Ministries
6551 Commerce Pkwy
Woodstock 30189
Mar 29: Constructing Raised Beds
Apr 5: Veggie Gardening 101
Sep 6: Finally Fall Vegetables

Woodstock Parks and Recreation
William G. Long Senior Center
223 Arrost Mill Rd
Woodstock 30188

Jan 18: Garden Planning
Jan 25: Raised Bed Gardening
Feb 8: Potatoes: Can You Dig it
Feb 20: Strawberries
Mar 8: Begonias
Mar 22: Totally Tomatoes
Apr 5: Ginger & Turmeric
Apr 19: Peppers
Aug 9: Fall Gardening
Aug 21: Turnip the Beet—Root Veg
Sep 19: Grow Great Garlic
Oct 4: Apples of North Georgia

Scan for detailed course descriptions and registration information.



2024 Year in Review

Canton Area

Cherokee Co. Senior Services
1001 Univerter Rd
Canton 30115

Feb 1: Seed Starting
Feb 22: All About Figs
Mar 1: Herbs
Apr 5: Art of Pressed Flowers
Apr 12: Garden Tool Care
May 10: Beginning Begonias
Jun 7: Heavenly Hydrangeas
Jul 19: Ways to Use Herbs
Aug 2: Landscaping for Birds
Sep 13: Fall Vegetable Gardening
Oct 11: Fall Color
Dec 6: Holiday Wreath Making

Cherokee Veterans Park
7345 Cumming Hwy
Canton 30115

Jan 24: Muscadines & Trellis
Feb 8: Garden Planning
Feb 15: Soil Health and Fertility
Feb 28: Raised Bed Construction
Mar 22: Dahlias
Mar 29: Perennials for Pollinators
Apr 12: Totally Tomatoes
Apr 19: Summer Annual Color
Apr 26: Cucurbits
May 10: Summer Cut Flower Gardens
May 24: Colorful Containers and Tasty Containers 2 different sessions
Jun 14: Peanuts and Sunflowers
Jun 28: Daylilies
Jul 12: Begonias
Sep 6: Herbs: Growing, Using, Preserving
Sep 27: Art of Pressed Flowers



Small Yard? Think Layers!continued from page 4



Flower of St. John's wort 'Sunburst' courtesy Debbie Roos North Carolina State University

Nearby are two native Saint John's wort shrubs (*Hypericum frondosum* 'Sunburst'). The St. John's wort's blue-green foliage is smothered with showy bright yellow flowers in summer, yielding to black berries. In fall, the leaves turn a gorgeous red and maroon color that lasts for weeks. This shrub, which grows in either full sun or part shade, is a favorite.

Other shrubs I planted on the east side of my property are azaleas (*Rhododendron* spp.), both native and non-native; the dwarf viburnum (*Viburnum obovatum* cultivars 'Compactum' and 'Mrs. Schiller's Delight'); and another arrowwood viburnum cultivar (*V. dentatum* 'Chicago Lustre'). Viburnums berry best with at least two different cultivars that bloom at the same time.



Oakleaf hydrangea (*H. quercifolia* 'Jetstream') courtesy Missouri Botanical Garden

Also installed on the east side are three native *Fothergilla gardenii* 'Mount Airy', a native New Jersey tea shrub (*Ceanothus americanus*), and five dwarf native oakleaf hydrangeas (*H. quercifolia* 'Jetstream', a cultivar resistant to leaf spot fungus). In addition to the large white flowers that age to pink, the oak-shaped leaves turn a lovely maroon in the fall.

I also selected native deciduous hollies, *Ilex verticillata* 'Winterberry' (female) and 'Southern Gentleman' (male) that will grow 12 feet tall, along with dwarf cultivars 'Berry Poppins' (female) and 'Mr. Poppins' (male) that top off at about 4 feet tall. (To produce berries, most hollies require at least one male to pollinate the females.) The red berries last into late winter. I also have three American beautyberries (*Callicarpa americana*) that volunteered in my yard, probably from birds carrying seed from a neighbor's shrubs. I ended up with both purple- and white-berrying varieties. Mockingbirds devour the berries.

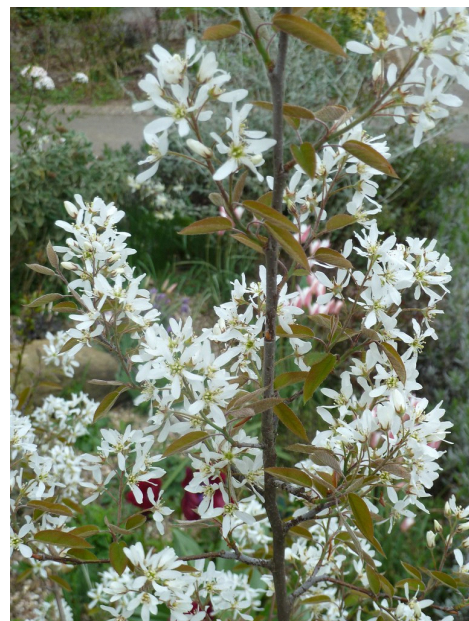
In my back garden, north of the house, I planted a southern blackhaw (*Viburnum rufidulum*), which is a small tree; three dwarf native witherod viburnum shrubs (*V. cassinoides* 'Lil Ditty'); two dwarf arrowwood viburnum (*V. dentatum*) cultivars, 'All That Glitters' and 'All That Glows'; and dwarf native smooth hydrangea (*H. arborescens* 'Invincibelle Wee White'). In front of my north-facing bedroom window, I replaced non-native cleyera (*Ternstroemia gymnanthera*) that wants to grow 15 feet tall) with a dwarf cultivar of summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia* 'Hummingbird') that tolerates full shade and provides sweetly-scented flowers in summer when few other shrubs are blooming. To the north of my rear screened porch, which also is partially in full shade, I grow non-native evergreen Japanese plum yew (*Cephalotaxus harringtonia* 'Prostrata') and variegated aucuba (*Aucuba japonica*).

Along my back fence, I planted another Saint John's wort 'Sunburst', three smooth witherod viburnums (*V. nudum*, two of the cultivar 'Brandywine' and one non-cultivar), three golden-leaved dwarf anise shrubs (*Illicium parviflorum* 'BananAppeal'), and hydrangeas *H. macrophylla* cultivar 'Pop Star' and *H. serrata* 'Bluebird'. Between the existing ornamental pond and the fence, three dwarf evergreen cherry laurels (*Prunus laurocerasus* 'Otto Luyken') were already growing. They are often recommended for shade, and I kept them, but I do not recommend the shrubs as they are highly susceptible to a shot-hole fungus.

On the west side of my house, I removed and sent to the dump an unfortunate number of non-native invasives: Japanese privet (*Ligustrum japonicum*), Chinese silvergrass (*Miscanthus sinensis*), heavenly bamboo (*Nandina domestica*, whose berries are poisonous to birds), and Japanese spirea (*Spiraea japonica*). To provide summer insulation on the west side of my house, I replaced the invasive plants with native shrubs that get a bit large: two more arrowwood viburnums and three Virginia sweetspires (*Itea virginica* 'Henry's Garnet'). In addition, I grow three blueberry cultivars. Blueberries also berry more heavily by having at least two different cultivars for cross-pollination.

For pictures and more detailed information about these shrubs, check online at the North Carolina State University Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox, <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu>, or the Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder, <https://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/>.

Around and beneath all of my shrubs, I grow many perennials and groundcovers and also use my trees and fence to support multiple vines. Information about these plants will be in our next newsletter.



Native serviceberry (*Amelanchier* spp.) courtesy North Carolina State University

Tips for Growing Dahlias in Georgia

- Choose heat-tolerant varieties.
- Plant tubers in the spring after the last frost has passed.
- Water regularly, especially during hot, dry weather.
- Mulch around the plants to conserve moisture and suppress weeds.
- Fertilize every few weeks during the growing season.
- Stake tall dahlias to prevent them from falling over.
- Deadhead spent blooms to encourage more flowers.
- Dig up dahlia tubers in the fall and store them in a cool, dry place.



Dahlia close-up courtesy Canva

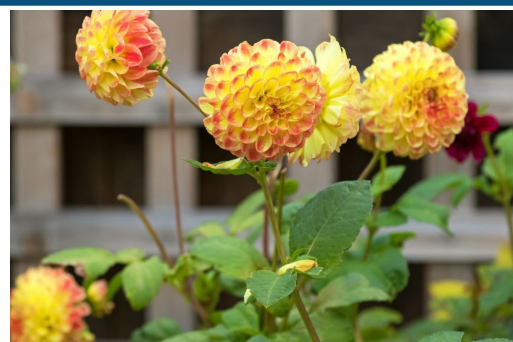
Growing dahlias is a rewarding experience. These beautiful flowers will add color, texture, and interest to your garden. With a little care, you can enjoy dahlias year after year.

For more information about dahlias, come to the Cherokee County Master Gardener class on this topic. It will be held on March 22, and you can register at the CCMG website <https://cherokeemastergardeners.com/>.



By Mary Tucker, *Master Gardener*

The dahlia is in the aster family (*Asteraceae*) and was named for the Swedish botanist Anders Dahl (1751-1789). Dahlias are native to Mexico, Central America, and northern South America.



Dahlia courtesy Canva

The taxonomy of the dahlia has been debated over the years, and there are currently almost 50 recognized species in the genus. However, most of the dahlias sold in the marketplace are hybrids and named cultivars, and there are many thousands of those!

The American Dahlia Society (<https://www.dahlia.org/>) classifies dahlias based on the size, form, and color of the bloom. Size classifications range from giant (over 10 inches) to micro (up to 2 inches). Forms include such names as cactus, lacinated, ball, and waterlily. The 15 color classifications include a wide variety such as white, yellow, pink, red, dark red, lavender, purple, bronze, flame blend, variegated, and bi-color. These features are coded into a four-digit classification number that is used to help growers identify their cultivars. It is also used in documentation, by sellers, and when dahlias are exhibited in shows.

How many birds can you find?

28th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count
February 14-17, 2025
birdcount.org



Ruby-crowned Kinglet/*Corthylio calendula*.
Photo: Mason Maron/Macaulay Library

The **Great Backyard Bird Count** has been an annual event since 1998 when it was launched by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. The purpose of this world-wide event is to help scientists evaluate the abundance and distribution of birds. This event also helps track bird population changes and trends that occur over the years.

It's easy and fun to take part in the GBBC. You can count birds anywhere: at home at your feeders, at a park or nature trail, or at any favorite birding site, such as a lake shore. Simply watch birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the four-day event. Keep a separate record for the different times or places that you participate. Count the highest number of each bird species observed at one time (to ensure the birds are not counted more than once). Also keep track of the amount of time spent counting. Then log in your data in one of three ways: the Merlin Bird ID App, the eBird Mobile App, or on a computer.

Visit the GBBC website (<https://www.birdcount.org/>) for more information about the event and how to participate.

Another bird-counting opportunity that is fun for all ages is Project FeederWatch, which takes place during the winter months and continues through the end of April. Visit <https://feederwatch.org/> to sign up.

FEBRUARY GARDENING TIPS

Ornamentals



Master Gardener, Shirley Lowe demonstrating rose pruning courtesy Marcia Winchester

Late February is the time to prune hybrid tea and Knock Out Roses®. Remove old canes, lowering plant to a height of 12-15 inches. Prune out dead and damaged canes leaving the center open for air flow. Apply a drop of white glue to the end of fresh cut canes to prevent borers.

Fertilize using a fertilizer heavy in potassium (K). Remove all debris and apply fresh mulch. **For more rose pruning info click [HERE](#).**

- 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. **For guidelines on pruning ornamental plants in the landscape, click [HERE](#).**
- Use a new plant light bulb to grow seedlings. Older, partially used bulbs may not give off sufficient light.
- Continue to fertilize pansies and other winter annuals with fertilizer high in nitrate nitrogen. **For success with winter pansies and annuals, click [HERE](#).**
- Prune clumps of ornamental grass before new growth appears. Tie large clumps with rope; cut with a hedge trimmer. **For care and maintenance of ornamental grasses, click [HERE](#).**

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

- 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. **For more information on growing peaches, click [HERE](#).**
- 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. **For more information on pruning fruit trees, click [HERE](#), and pruning grapes, click [HERE](#).**
- Remember that some vegetable seeds have a short life of only 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. **For a vegetable garden calendar resource, click [HERE](#).**
- 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. Handle seed packets with care. Rubbing the outside to determine how many seeds are inside can break the protective seed coats, thereby reducing germination. **For more information on seed starting, click [HERE](#).**



Seed starting tray. **For more tray options, click [HERE](#).**

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 2024	Dec 2024	YTD 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	YTD 2024
Actual	3.0	6.2	53.0	3.3	4.1	58.4
Normal	4.5	4.6	55.9	3.8	4.6	48.9
Deviation	-1.5	1.6	-2.9	-0.5	-0.5	9.5

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 [HERE](#).**
- 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. **For information on crape myrtle growing and maintenance, click [HERE](#).**
- Cut back butterfly bushes to 1/3 desired height.
- Divide daylily and hosta clumps when the leaves just start to emerge from the ground so you don't damage the new growth. **For more hosta info, click [HERE](#).**
- 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. **For more info on flowering perennial care, click [HERE](#).**
- Fertilize spring bulbs after they bloom. Do not remove leaves until they turn yellow.
- Give your roses a starter application of complete fertilizer.
- Start fertilizing pansies and winter annuals with houseplant fertilizer.

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. **For more info on home gardening and strawberries, click [HERE](#).**
- 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.
- 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. **For more information on growing home garden lettuce, click [HERE](#).**
- Do not add lime to the area for potatoes. The lower pH helps control scab. **For more information on growing home garden potatoes, click [HERE](#).**



Evidence of severe "Crape Murder".
To avoid aggressive pruning, click [HERE](#).

MISCELLANEOUS

- 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. **For more info on how to attract birds to your landscape, click [HERE](#).**
- Spring is a good time to install nest boxes and hole size is very important for cavity-nesting birds. **For more information on cavity nesting birds and sizes, click [HERE](#).**
- 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. **For more information and facts about purple martins, click [HERE](#).**
- Put out hummingbird feeders in mid-March, and make sure the roosting material has been cleaned out of your bluebird houses after winter.



Photo hummingbird and feeders courtesy John Ruscilli

Recipes

Slow Cooker Pesto Chicken

From Maurya Jones

INGREDIENTS:

6 cups unsalted chicken stock
1/2 cup reduced fat pesto sauce
1 tsp. kosher salt
1/2 tsp. black pepper
1-1/2 pounds skinless boneless chicken breasts
9 oz. store-bought refrigerated cheese tortellini
10 oz. baby spinach

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In a crock pot or slow cooker, stir together the chicken stock, pesto, salt, and black pepper. Add the chicken. Cover and cook until the chicken is tender, 6 to 8 hours on Low or 3 to 4 hours on High.
2. Remove the chicken from the cooker and cool slightly. If the crock pot is set to Low, turn it on High. Add the tortellini; cover and cook until the pasta is tender, 10 to 15 minutes. Shred the chicken with two forks. Stir the chicken and spinach into the soup, just until the spinach wilts.
3. Serving size: about 1-2/3 cups



Pesto soup courtesy Maurya Jones

Brownie Trifle

From Pat Burgess

INGREDIENTS:

1 box brownie mix (21 oz.)
1 bag Heath Bar bits (16 oz.)
1 box Jell-O chocolate instant pudding mix (5.1 oz.)
1/4 c. amaretto, coffee liqueur, or chocolate liqueur (optional)
1 container Cool Whip (12 oz.)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare brownie mix according to package directions. Bake and set aside to cool. If using the liqueur, sprinkle over brownies while warm. When cool, crumble brownies into pieces.
2. Prepare pudding according to package direction.
3. In a trifle dish, layer (in order) half of each: brownies, pudding, Cool Whip, Heath Bar bits. Repeat all layers ending with the Heath Bar bits on top.
4. Refrigerate at least 8 hours before serving.



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