Shades of Green

Agriculture and Natural Resources E-Newsletter

April 2025

A Note from Athens-Clarke County Agriculture & Natural Resources

Hello readers!

If you have questions about soil or water testing, starting your garden, pest and disease issues, plant ID, turfgrass, or any of our programs and offerings, don't hesitate to stop by the office or reach out by email to lney@uga.edu (Ag Agent), vlc74120@uga.edu (Ag Educator) or by phone at 706-613– 3640.

Spring gardening is in full swing here as the flowers bloom and the trees leaf out! See 'Starting your spring vegetable garden from seed' for great info on getting prepared to grow veggies this season. We have compiled information on local plant sales, Farmer's Markets and of course the Athens-Area Honey Bee Festival!

Included in this issue...

Articles

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UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION
Athens-Clarke County

Starting your spring vegetable garden from seed

A great garden starts with a little planning. UGA Cooperative Extension horticulture specialists provide expert advice on starting plants from seeds to get a head start for your best vegetable garden yet.

Compiled by Emily Cabrera

With temperatures swinging down around 30 degrees Fahrenheit in Georgia each night, it may not feel like spring is around the corner, but now is the perfect time to start preparing your vegetable garden.

Starting seeds indoors can give you a jump on the growing season, helping you stay ahead of the stifling summer heat and the inevitable wave of insect pests. While the cold lingers, plenty of garden prep can be done indoors, including ordering seeds, mapping out your garden and purchasing supplies online or from your local gardening store. With mild afternoons upon us, you'll be ready to tackle outdoor preparations.

1. Seed/plant selection

With seed catalogs arriving and local garden centers soon stocking vegetable plants, now is the perfect time to plan your garden. The UGA Extension resource "Best Garden Vegetable Varieties for Georgia" offers recommended varieties that have been trialed and proven to grow successfully in the state. While this isn't an exhaustive list, it's a great starting point for new gardeners. Keep in mind that some varieties may not be available at local garden centers, so checking online retailers and seed catalogs can help you find the perfect plants for your garden.

Select disease-resistant varieties. Choose high-quality seeds from a reliable dealer to ensure they are true to variety and free from contaminants. Look for varieties labeled as resistant to common pests and diseases, such as nematodes, powdery mildew or fusarium wilt, to minimize the need for chemical treatments. Select cultivars suited to your region that can withstand heat and thrive in local growing conditions. Store any leftover seeds in a cool, dry place to maintain their viability for future planting.

Choose the right planting time. Understanding a plant's days to maturity is also essential, particularly for beginners or gardeners dealing with unpredictable weather. If starting seeds indoors for transplants, timing is key. Seedlings should be ready for the garden when soil temperatures are suitable, and the risk of frost has passed. Starting seeds too early may result in transplants outgrowing their containers before they can be safely moved outdoors.

Seed packet information varies widely but contains valuable information, often including the packing year ("sell by" or "grown for"), spacing, planting depth, germination time and thinning instructions. Choose seeds packed for the current season and keep packets for future garden records.

In general, sow seeds six to eight weeks before transplanting. For instance, if your average last frost date is April 15, begin tomato seeds indoors in late February or early March. Properly timed warm-season crops (such as tomatoes and squash) will be garden-ready by spring, while cool-season vegetables (like broccoli and cabbage) should be planted early enough in the fall to establish and produce before the first frost. Following UGA Extension's "Vegetable Planting Chart" can help ensure better yields.

Think about space and growth habits. Once your seedlings are ready to be transplanted outdoors, you'll want to be sure you have the right space for them. Compact or bush varieties work well for small gardens or containers while vining crops like cucumbers and pole beans need trellises or extra space.

Match plants to your soil and light conditions. Most vegetables thrive with six to eight hours of full sun and well-draining soil. A soil test through your county Extension office can identify any necessary amendments to improve plant health before transplanting your seedlings outdoors.

Grow what you like to eat. It's easy to get excited about new varieties, but focusing on vegetables you and your family enjoy will ensure your harvest gets used. For more in-depth guidance, refer to UGA Extension's "Home Garden" series

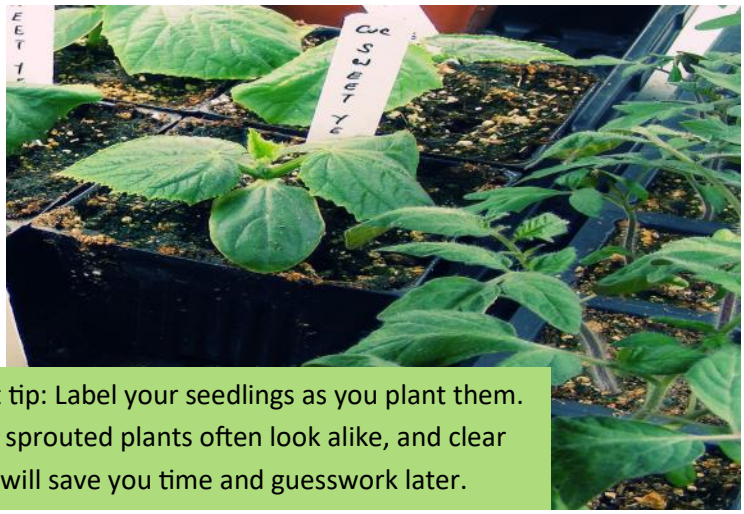
2. Transplanting vs. direct sowing

Seeds can be started in containers for later transplanting or sown directly in the garden. In general, plant seeds at a depth about twice their size. Very small seeds should be lightly pressed into the soil and barely covered.

Transplanting has benefits including climate control, a longer growing season and better management of seedlings. It helps plants develop strong roots that absorb nutrients and moisture efficiently, while also protecting them from larger pests like crickets and pill bugs. Starting plants indoors or in containers lets you time their outdoor planting for optimal growth. This method improves survival rates, maximizes space and allows you to discard weak seedlings. Be sure to keep seed-starting media moist but avoid overwatering to prevent rot or disease.

Best for transplanting:

Broccoli, Cabbage, Tomato, Pepper, Lettuce, Chard, Spinach, Collard green, Kale, Strawberry



Expert tip: Label your seedlings as you plant them. Newly sprouted plants often look alike, and clear labels will save you time and guesswork later.

Some plants grow best when seeded directly into the garden or container. Direct seeding is particularly well-suited to plants with large seeds (like beans, corn and pumpkins) and root crops (like carrots and beets). Sow seeds directly into the container or ground where they will grow. Prepare a smooth seed bed and follow depth guidelines on seed packets.

Best for direct seeding:

Carrot, Radish, Beet, Okra, Corn, Squash
Cucumber, Melon, Sugar snap pea, Green bean
By choosing the right method for each plant, you'll give your seedlings the best chance to thrive.

For most seeds sown directly into the soil, opt for loose, well-aerated soil to promote air circulation, water infiltration and healthy root growth. Avoid planting seeds too deep, as this can hinder germination. Check the seed packet for specific depth recommendations.

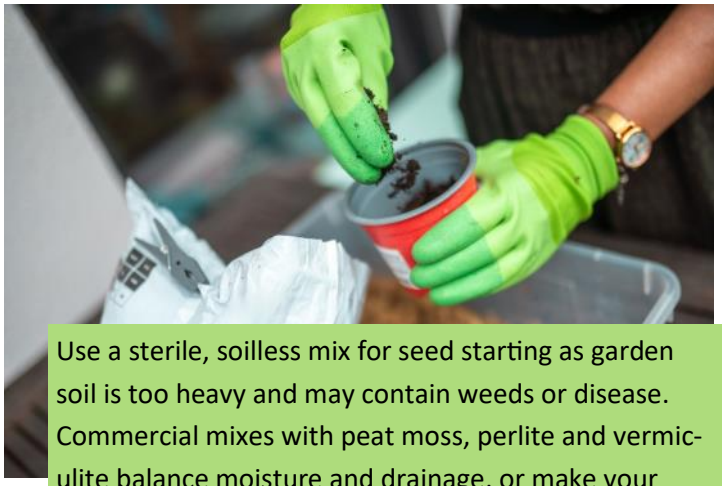
3. Gathering materials

Use a starting mix. For best results, use a sterile, soilless seed-starting mix rather than garden soil. Garden soil can be too heavy, hold too much water and may contain weed seeds or diseases that can harm young seedlings. A good seed-starting mix is light, fine-textured and uniform to ensure good seed-to-soil contact.

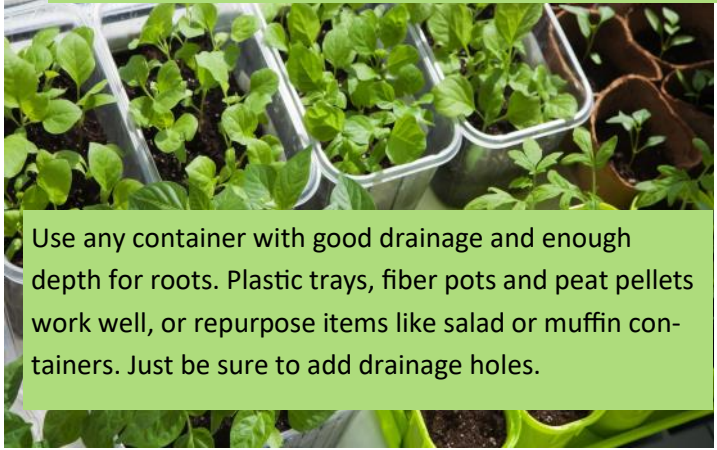
Many commercial seed-starting mixes contain peat moss, perlite and vermiculite, which provide the right balance of moisture retention and drainage. For experienced gardeners, garden centers offer materials to create custom potting soil. Try mixing shredded sphagnum peat moss with fine vermiculite, then add a small amount of superphosphate and ground limestone to balance nutrients. Before planting, wet the mix completely and let it sit for a few days to create the best conditions for seedling growth.

Use clean, well-draining containers. Any container can be used for starting seeds as long as it drains well, is deep enough for root growth and is sanitized before use. Plastic trays, fiber pots and peat pellets are popular choices, but you can also repurpose items like salad boxes or muffin containers — just be sure to add drainage holes. Clear plastic containers with lids act as miniature greenhouses, creating a humid environment ideal for germination.

For easy transplanting, consider peat pellets or individual cell trays, which minimize root disturbance. If reusing containers, sanitize them by washing away debris and soaking them in a 1:9 bleach-to-water solution, then rinsing thoroughly. Clean containers and sterile seed-starting mix help prevent fungal diseases that can harm young seedlings.



Use a sterile, soilless mix for seed starting as garden soil is too heavy and may contain weeds or disease. Commercial mixes with peat moss, perlite and vermiculite balance moisture and drainage, or make your own with peat and fine vermiculite. Pre-wet before planting for better germination.



Use any container with good drainage and enough depth for roots. Plastic trays, fiber pots and peat pellets work well, or repurpose items like salad or muffin containers. Just be sure to add drainage holes.

4. Germinating seeds indoors

Seedlings need bright light to grow strong and avoid becoming spindly. A sunny window may not be enough, especially in winter. Use adjustable LED or fluorescent grow lights, keeping them a few inches above seedlings for 12 to 16 hours daily.

Germination is the process of the embryo emerging from the seed. It starts with the absorption of water, called imbibition. Germination is heavily influenced by four environmental factors: water, oxygen, light and temperature. To aid germination, cover containers with plastic wrap or a bag to retain moisture, but remove it once the seeds sprout. Seedlings need strong, consistent light — provide 16 hours of light daily, with grow lights 2 to 3 inches above them, adjusting as they grow. Without enough light, seedlings can become weak and spindly.

Water is essential for seeds to start growing. Without it, seeds stay dormant. But getting the right amount is key — too much water can cause seeds to rot, while too little can dry them out before they sprout. Keeping the soil consistently moist is important, but heavy watering can wash seeds away or compact the soil. A gentle mist from a spray bottle works best to provide even moisture. Covering seeds with a thin layer of vermiculite or peat moss helps them stay hydrated. To maintain humidity, cover seed trays with a clear plastic dome or loosely place them inside a plastic bag, but remove the covering once seedlings emerge.

Seeds need oxygen to “breathe” as they grow. As seeds begin to sprout, they take in oxygen and release carbon dioxide. If the soil is too heavy or waterlogged, it can block oxygen flow and stop germination. That’s why seed-starting mixes are light and well-draining — garden soil is often too dense for young seedlings.

Some seeds need light to germinate, while others require darkness. Many will sprout just fine either way. Seed packets or catalogs will usually specify what's needed. If a seed needs light, press it gently onto the soil surface without covering it. If it needs darkness, add a thin layer of peat moss or vermiculite on top.

Once seedlings emerge, they need plenty of bright light to grow strong and avoid becoming long and spindly. A sunny windowsill may not provide enough light, especially in winter. Using grow lights can help — position them just a few inches above the seedlings and keep them on for 12 to 16 hours per day. Adjustable LED or fluorescent grow lights work best, as they produce little heat and can be moved as plants grow.

The right temperature helps seeds germinate faster and more successfully. Some seeds have strict temperature needs, while others are more flexible. Most common garden seeds sprout best in soil between 65-75F. You can use a thermometer to check the temperature inside seed trays.

If needed, place trays on a heating mat or in a warm spot in your home, like near a radiator. Once the seeds sprout, move them to a bright area and gradually lower the temperature to 65F to help them grow strong.

5. Getting plants ready for growing outdoors

Make sure to thin seedlings before transplanting. When starting seeds, gardeners often plant more than needed to ensure that enough germinate. However, once seedlings emerge — especially tiny ones like carrots — they must be thinned to prevent overcrowding. Without enough space, plants compete for water, light, and nutrients, which can stunt growth or even cause death. Check seed packets for proper spacing and remove extra seedlings by snipping them at the base rather than pulling them out.

Once seedlings develop their first true leaves, they can be transplanted into larger containers or the garden. Carefully lift them by the roots using a pencil or dibble tool — never tug by the stem, as this can damage the plant. Place seedlings at the same depth they were growing before, water thoroughly and check moisture levels daily, especially if they're under grow lights or on a heat mat.

For healthy growth, fertilize transplants lightly — starting at half the recommended strength — and repeat every two weeks. Avoid fertilizing wilted or moisture-stressed plants, as this can cause further damage.

Before moving seedlings outdoors, they need time to adjust to direct sunlight and changing temperatures. This process, called hardening off, helps strengthen plants for life in the garden. Start by placing them in a shady outdoor spot for a few hours each day, gradually increasing their time outside over one to two weeks. On cooler days, reducing temperature and water can also help prepare them for outdoor conditions. A slow transition prevents stress and ensures seedlings thrive once planted in the garden.

Plant the seedlings in the ground or in raised garden beds. Locate the garden in an area that will have at least six to eight hours of sunlight per day. Till the bed to a depth of 6 to 10 inches, incorporating 4 inches of good organic matter into the mix. Remove any sticks and stones. Smooth the soil with a rake and plant seedlings according to their spacing requirements listed on the seed packet.

Some plants, like tomatoes and peppers, benefit from deeper planting. Bury tomato stems up to the first set of leaves or lay them sideways with the leaves above soil level to encourage strong root growth. Water newly transplanted seedlings well for the first few weeks as they become established.

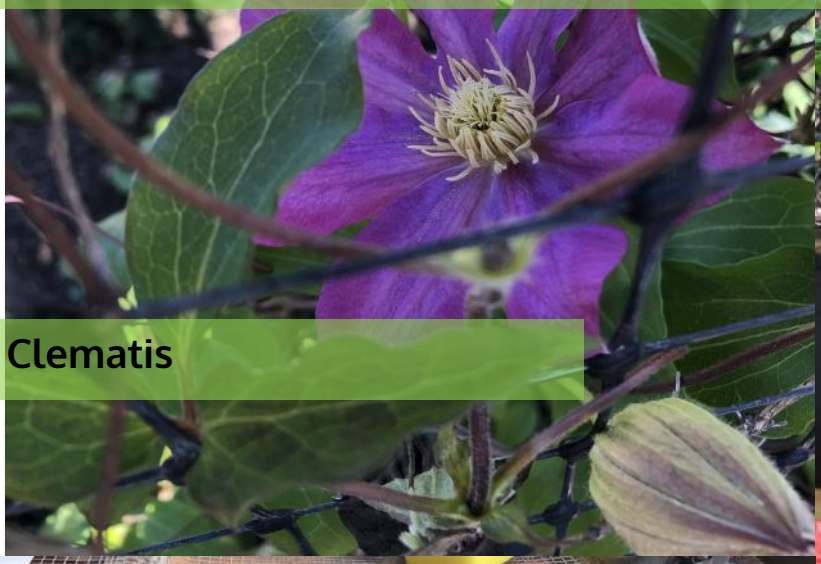
Give starting seeds a try this season. Starting seeds indoors gives you the flexibility to grow a variety of plants while saving money. With just soil, light, water, seeds and time, you can get a jumpstart on your spring garden. Pick a couple of vegetables you enjoy eating and consider your space, schedule and goals to decide if indoor seed starting is the right fit for you.

Harden off seedlings before planting by gradually exposing them to sunlight and outdoor conditions over one to two weeks. Start in the shade fo a few hours, then increase time outside to prevent stress and ensure strong growth.

Preparing beds for spring planting

Fig

What's Happening at the ACC Extension Office?



Clematis

Prep for AAMGA plant sale

Azaleas blooming

APRIL PLANT SALES

Clarke Central FFA Spring Plant Sale: April 2nd- April 5th at CCHS, 350 S Milledge AVE, Athens GA https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1182013113926598&id=100063537615287

UGA Trial Garden Spring Plant Sale: April 5th, 8am-1pm https://ugatrial.hort.uga.edu/#:~:text=Spring%20Sale%202025,Trial%20Garden%

Marigold Mingle

Saturday, April 19th, 2025

Doors open at 6 pm, music at 7 pm

Marigold Auditorium for Arts & Culture

Winterville, GA

Marigold Market Plant Sale: all plants grown by our farmers and can be picked up at our first Saturday market on April 5th, 9-1; flier below, link here

R&R Secret Flowers Spring Plant Sale; Saturdays April 12th and 19th 10-4pm, Sundays April 13th and 20th 10-2pm, R&R Secret Flowers 919 N. Chase Street Athens, GA 30601- Preview Plants online: www.rrsecretflowers.com and shop from a wide selection of sustainably grown plants to make the garden of your dreams, including veggies, herbs, flowers, perennials, and natives.

Athens Area Master Gardener Association Spring Plant Sale

Saturday, April 26th, 2025

8 AM—1 PM

ACC Extension Office, 275 Cleveland RD Bogart GA 30622

Come out to enjoy a selection of annuals, perennials, shrubs/trees, vegetable starts and houseplants selected by Athens Master Gardeners. Proceeds go to project budgets and local scholarship funds.

Athens Area Master Gardener Spring Bulb Sale, Order Forms available online and due by April 30th.

See https://tinyurl.com/2025bulbsale

State Botanical Garden of Georgia Spring Plant Sale: Saturday, April 19th 8am-2 pm https://botgarden.uga.edu/event/spring-plant-sale/2025-04-19/

Athens Native Plant Society Spring Plant Sale

May 3rd, 10-2 Sunrise Nursery, Winterville GA

UGA Bee Lab Pollinator Plant Sale: Spring 2025, April 26th, 10am-2 pm UGA Horticulture Farm, 1221 Hog Mountain RD, Watkinsville GA https://bees.caes.uga.edu/about-us/pollinator-plant-sale.html

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION

EASTERN PIEDMONT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

An Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, Veteran, Disability Institution

Athens - Area Honey Bee Festival

Family Friendly

May 24th, 2025

- Kids activities and crafts
- Face painting
- Bee hive explorations
- Honey tasting
- Plants for sale
- Food
- Games
- and more!

This is a free event. Donations will be accepted.

10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

ACC Extension Office
275 Cleveland Rd, Bogart
GA 30622

ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY GEORGIA

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EXTENSION

Athens-Clarke County

Ask a Master Gardener at

April -November 2025

MARIGOLD FARMERS MARKET!

ATHENS FARMERS MARKET

Athens Area Master Gardener Spring Plant Sale

APRIL 26th, 2025

8 AM – 2 PM

ACC Extension Office
275 Cleveland RD
Bogart, GA 30622

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA EXTENSION
Master Gardener Extension Volunteer Program

Great selection of annuals, herbaceous perennials and shrubs, natives, veggie starts and houseplants. Proceeds support various AAMGA projects and scholarship funds.

Athens Area Master Gardeners

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA EXTENSION
Athens-Clarke County

Contact ACC Extension at 706-613-3640

AAMGA 2025 Spring Daffodil Sale

Daffodils are Deer Resistant!!

Order form located on website: https://tinyurl.com/2025bulbsale

Orders must be received by April 30th, 2025

Pickup in October at ACC Extension (275 Cleveland RD, Bogart GA)

Selections:

Tahiti

Thalia

Pink Charm

Pipit

Dutch Master

Kedron

Barrett Browning LS

Gritty Southern Blend

Jetfire (Miniature)

Yellow Sailboat

Specialty Bulbs:

Spanish Bluebells

Snowdrops

Georgia Native Plant Society

ATHENS - EAST PIEDMONT CHAPTER

Native Plant Sale

May 3, 2025 - 10am to 2pm

Sponsored by Sunrise Nursery

550 Athens Rd, Winterville, GA 30683

Choose from a wide selection of native perennials, grasses, sedges, ferns, trees, shrubs and vines. Plants offered are grown without neonicotinoids and the selection will consist of mostly straight species. Proceeds will support our chapter initiatives of promoting and conserving Georgia native plants.
Please bring a wagon, cart, or box to transport plants.

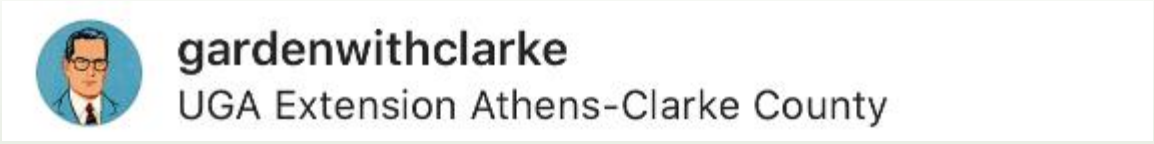
Learn more on our website:
https://gnps.org/athens-east-piedmont-chapter/

Concerned about the state of your garden?

Are weeds taking over your landscape?

No need to fear, Clarke is here!

Follow @gardenwithclarke on Instagram and learn how to battle pests, identify weeds, build your soil and so much more as you garden alongside Clarke, Athens-Clarke County's super gardener!



Helpful resources online:

Find My Local Extension Office

Georgia Turf

Free Online Webinars

Pest Management Handbook

Pesticide Applicator Info

Georgia Certified Plant Professional

Bugwood— Pest Images

UGA Center for Urban Agriculture

Extension Publications

Online*Landscape Alerts*

Athens-Clarke County Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources

Mission Statement

The UGA Athens-Clarke County Extension's mission is to respond to the people's needs and interest in Agriculture, the Environment, Families, and 4-H/youth in Athens-Clarke County with unbiased, research-based education and information.

Visit us online:

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA EXTENSION

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