



Sequatchie Valley MASTER GARDENERS

November 2019 Issue

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Recording hours

As the year winds down make sure you have recorded all your volunteer hours and your Continuing Education Units (CEUs).

Impact of the program thus far

\$10,378.85

Total value of the economic impact of the Extension Master Gardener program in Sequatchie and Bledsoe Counties

300.5 Hours entered value \$6,812.34

88.5 hours recorded for projects in Bledsoe Co.

212 hours recorded for projects in Sequatchie Co.*

*as of October 30, 2019

November: Indoor Citrus

Enjoy Growing Citrus, Even in Tennessee



Plant of the month article on page 3

Easy-care citrus grown in containers, like this Meyer lemon, can be brought inside during cold months and will enchant throughout the year with its glossy, dark leaves, fragrant blossoms and sweet-tart fruit. Photo credit: Logee's Plants for Home & Garden

Dates for 2020

A full list of upcoming dates for 2020 will be included in the December Issue

- **Quarterly meeting**, February 1, 2020, Dunlap, Details to come

Soil sampling and testing

Author: Nutifafa Adotey, Soil and Nutrient Management Extension Specialist

Planning to get the most out of your crop next spring? Soil testing after post-harvest is a valuable step in accomplishing this goal. While soil testing is the only practical means to adequately evaluate the nutritional needs in a field to prescribe appropriate lime and fertilizer recommendations, the reliability of soil test results depends on the quality of the sample submitted to the soil testing laboratory. Poor sampling can result in inaccurate soil test results and produce unreliable lime and fertilizer recommendations. Some helpful soil sampling information:

- Soil samples can be collected at any time, but some soil properties (soil pH, phosphorus (P), and potassium (K), for example) can vary depending on the time of sampling.
- While soil test results from University of Tennessee Soil, Plant, & Pest Center come back within 3 to 5 days, it is best to sample months ahead of planting to allow for planning and getting prices on lime or fertilizer.
- A good rule of thumb for soil sampling is to collect samples in a way that adequately represents the soil in that field. A well represented sample will consist of 10 – 20 core samples taken at the appropriate depth within a 5/10-acre grid.
- University of Tennessee Soil, Plant, & Pest Center as well as commercial soil testing laboratories in Tennessee recommend taking soil samples to a depth of 6 inches.
- The frequency of soil testing depends on cropping intensities, soil types, fertilization rate, tillage methods, and weather conditions; however, fields should be tested every two to three year to estimate the residual nutrient levels. For high-value cash crops (tobacco, vegetables, etc.) soils should be tested annually.
- Soil testing is also recommended any time a nutrient deficiency problem is suspected or at the beginning of different crop rotation system.
- Soil samples and a completed soil information sheet can be taken to your county Extension office or directly sent to University of Tennessee Soil, Plant, & Pest Center, Nashville.
- Addition information about UT Soil, Plant & Pest Center can be obtained from your County UT Extension Offices or at <https://ag.tennessee.edu/spp>



Jon Traunfeld of the University of Maryland Extension shows how to take a correct soil sample.
Photo source: Flickr

Source: UTCrops.com October 16, 2019 blog post



UT Gardens Plant of the Month

November: Indoor Citrus

Enjoy Growing Citrus, Even in Tennessee

Oranges, lemons and limes are members of the genus *Citrus*, which is part of the rue family. The fruit is native to southern Asia, Malaysia and Australia. Humans began moving citrus from these regions during some of the earliest migrations of ancient times. The fruits' history, in fact, is every bit as colorful as its skin. Romans cultivated citrus trees across their territory. Traders on the Silk Road bartered in them, and Spanish conquistadores brought them to Florida. George Washington grew them at Mount Vernon.

You can enjoy a citrus tree of your own in just the way our first president did by growing the plant in a container. Bring the pot indoors well before the first frost and return the plant to the outdoors in spring after the weather is reliably above 50 degrees. Whether you choose an orange, lemon or lime tree, citrus offer the excitement of watching tiny fruit grow and mature. Plus, citrus blossoms offer a heavenly fragrance.

The following varieties do well as indoor citrus grown in pots. Look for them at area plant nurseries and garden centers:

- Improved 'Meyer' lemon (*Citrus x meyeri* 'Improved') is a luscious lemon-orange hybrid with a very thin skin and sweeter pulp than other types of lemons. The plant has dark, shiny leaves.
- Calamondin (*Citrofortunella microcarpa* or *Citrus madurensis*) is grown largely as an ornamental because its small, round, orange fruit are sour. 'Peters' is an eye-catching variegated form.
- 'Trovita' orange (*Citrus sinensis*) grows medium-small, flavorful fruit that ripens quickly. The plant often is alternate bearing.
- Kaffir lime (*Citrus hystrix*) is an exotic citrus prized for its fragrant leaves that are used in Thai and other Southeast Asian cooking. It does produce a small, bumpy green fruit. Kaffir trees have striking foliage where one leaf appears to grow from another.

Care

Citrus need quick-draining, somewhat acidic soil. Cactus mix works well. Use a well-draining, deep pot to help stabilize the tree, and size pots up as the plant grows. Keep soil moist, but not sodden. When the tree is indoors, less water will be needed because growth slows. Adding humidity to the dry indoor air, though, is important. Mist regularly and consider using humidity trays or a small humidifier.

Citrus trees need 8 to 12 hours of sun a day. Choose a spot outdoors that's out of strong winds. A site near a heat source, such as a brick wall, is beneficial. Indoors, place the tree in a sunroom or the sunniest window you have, keeping it out of drafts. Use of grow lights will extend short winter days, and the added light is important for fruit production. Expect some leaf and fruit drop to occur as the plant adjusts to being indoors. Once back outside, though, the tree will rebound quickly. Acclimate the tree across a week or more each time you move it indoors and out. In fall, first move the tree from sun to dappled light, then to shade. Reverse the process in spring.

Citrus are heavy feeders. Specialized citrus/avocado fertilizers can be found, yet any all-purpose fertilizer with at least a 2-1-1 ratio can be used, as can fertilizers sold for acid-loving plants. Choose a granular, slow release formulation, although diluted soluble fertilizers can be applied when the plant is actively growing.

While citrus are generally healthy, they do attract a few pests, as Spider mites often appear in late winter. Spray them with a water solution to which a squirt of dishwashing soap has been added. Heavier infestations may require horticultural soap or oil. Once the tree is outdoors, keep watch for scale. Ants can aggravate scale infestations. Lower that risk by use of ant traps or by applying a 3- to 4-inch band of sticky insect barrier such as Tanglefoot® around the trunk near the tree's base. The occasional aphid or two can be brushed away by hand.

Gardening Tips

“Gardening requires lots of water - most of it in the form of perspiration.”

Lou Erickson



December Garden Tips

By early December, gardening is the last thing on most peoples' minds. Nonetheless, here are some timely plant and garden related tips from the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture:

Planning

- December is a good month to start thinking about landscape improvements for next season.
- Gardening catalogs should start arriving this month. Start a list of items that you want to purchase for next spring. This is also a good time to review pictures you have taken of your gardens during the past growing season. You can see what you might need to add to your gardens and yard.

Shrubs and trees

- As long as the ground is not frozen, you can plant trees and shrubs in your landscape. Be sure to mulch transplants and keep them well watered.
- Prune trees and shrubs that are dormant or rejuvenate overgrown shrubs by severely cutting them back. Keep in mind that if you prune spring flowering shrubs, like azaleas and forsythia, you are pruning off their spring flowers.
- Prune evergreen branches to use in holiday decorating.

Perennials, annuals, and bulbs

- Remove heavy layers of stray leaves that may have accumulated around perennials. They can mat down and smother perennials, and they promote rotting.
- Empty the soil from your container gardens. Add the soil to your garden beds or to the compost pile. Clean, sterilize, and store the pots. They will be ready for planting next year.
- Plant paperwhite narcissus bulbs in a shallow container of soil or gravel. They will bloom indoors during the winter months. They need no special cold treatment, only a steady supply of moisture. Keep the container in bright sunlight. You might have to stake or tie flowering stems upright if they grow too floppy. These delicate little flowers send out a fragrance that will permeate your home.

Fruits and veggies

- Weather permitting, spray fruit trees with lime Sulphur and dormant oil to rid trees of over wintering insect eggs and fungus. Thorough coverage is important. Do not spray when temperatures are below freezing.

Indoor gardening

- Check houseplants frequently to see if they need water.
- Reduce or eliminate houseplant fertilizing during short winter days unless your plants continue to grow actively. Most plants grow more slowly now because there are so few hours of bright light each day.
- Wash your plants with lukewarm water with a few drops of mild dishwashing liquid added. Dust and grime not only looks bad on the leaves, they filter what limited light we have this time of year. They also invite insect pests.
- Inspect houseplant leaves especially the undersides for the fine webbing and pinprick yellow discoloration. These are signs of spider mite infestation. Spider mites are common pests that thrive in warm, dry, indoor conditions. They are very difficult to see without magnification.

Chores and maintenance

- Continue to keep bird feeders full. Word will get around, and many visitors will come to call during the winter months if you provide a steady supply of suet and seed!
- From an environmental standpoint, spreading sawdust, sand, or cat litter is the best way to deal with icy sidewalks, steps and driveways. If you prefer to use a deicer, try urea nitrogen fertilizer. It can burn plants if heavily concentrated, but used with restraint it actually helps fertilize grass and shrubs adjacent to treated areas.
- Drain your hoses and put them away so they don't freeze and burst.
- Clean and oil your garden tools for winter storage. Place some sand and oil in a large bucket, then slide your garden tools in and out of the sand. This will do an excellent job of cleaning them, as well as applying a light coat of oil that will prevent rusting.
- December is a good month to replace garden tools that have seen better days. Prices are generally lower this time of year.

Some Special Gardening Tips For the Holidays

Fresh greenery around the house is a holiday tradition. Here are some tips from the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture for keeping the halls decked and merry:

- Poinsettias are the favored flowering holiday plant. While red is still the traditional color, pinks, whites, variegated, salmon and yellow varieties abound. Plant sizes vary from standard four- to six-inch pots, to miniatures to tree forms and even hanging baskets. Regardless of the size or variety, poinsettias like bright light and even moisture. With plenty of light, they can keep their colored bracts for many months. All too often, however, poinsettias are used as centerpieces, away from lights. Leaf dropping can be avoided with a little extra light.
- Besides poinsettias, consider purchasing Christmas cactus, kalanchoes, and cyclamens to make your home more festive for the holidays. Be sure to remove any foil wraps on the containers. These can hold water in the pots, which might cause the plants to rot from excess moisture. Make sure these plants are well wrapped before leaving the store for the trip home.
- If you plant amaryllis bulbs now, you can have blooms by Christmas. Amaryllis also come in multiple colors now. After the magnificent bloom is spent, cut off the bloom stalk and place the pot in a sunny window.
- Keep fresh-cut Christmas trees in a cool, not freezing location. After bringing a tree home, cut 1 to 2" from the base and plunge it into a bucket of tepid water with preservative added to prevent the cut end from sealing over. Don't let the water run dry! When bringing a tree indoors for decorating, allow it to rest in the stand with water in it for several hours to allow the tree to "relax" its branches as it becomes acclimated to indoor warmth. Then decorate.
- Potted or balled Christmas trees should be placed in a cool, not freezing, area until brought indoors for decorating. These trees should not be brought in for extended periods. A day or two indoors before Christmas and a few days after will not harm them. If kept too long indoors, they will break dormancy. After Christmas, take the tree out to a chosen site and plant it. Water well and mulch.
- Don't forget the gardener on your gift list. A gift certificate to a nursery, garden center, gardening magazine or mail order source would be appreciated.

The Extension Master Gardener Program is a program of the University of Tennessee Extension

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Useful links

Sequatchie Valley Master Gardening Program
<https://tiny.utk.edu/SVMG>

TMG Volunteer Handbook
<https://extension.tennessee.edu/MasterGardener/Documents/W099-%20Volunteer.%20November.pdf>



Short Rows



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND

Is it true, does the coloring of woolly bear caterpillars (or woolly worms) really predict the severity of winter? No. according to the Nebraska Project WILD the coloring is based on how long the caterpillar has been feeding, its age, and its species. via Nebraska Project WILD <http://bit.ly/35Umyta>

The size and color are really an indicator the growing season. In other words, the bigger the woolly bear the nicer the late summer and early fall has been. To quote the source: "This (good growing conditions) results in narrower red-orange bands in its middle. Thus, the width of the banding is an indicator of the current or past season's growth rather than an indicator of the severity of the upcoming winter. Also, the coloring indicates the age of the woolly bear caterpillar. The caterpillars shed their skins or molt six times before reaching adult size. With each successive molt, their colors change, becoming less black and more reddish. In addition, there are approximately 260 species of tiger moths (the adult of the woolly bear caterpillar) in North America, and each species has slightly different color patterns and hair coverings. As a result, some of the color and hair variations that we see each fall are a result of these different species."

Source Extension Master Gardener Facebook page

[U.S. National Weather Service \(NWS\)](http://U.S. National Weather Service (NWS)) , Woolly Bear Caterpillar - Winter Predictor Or Not?: <http://bit.ly/2By6RKe>