

Woodford Horticulture Update



Plant Spotlight

Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) are ephemeral perennials, meaning they come up in early spring and have a short growing season. Plants have smooth, oval leaves with prominent veins. The foliage is deep purple when it emerges, then quickly turns green. The 2- to 8-inch-long leaves are longest at the base of the plant. The loose clusters of bell-shaped flowers dangle from arched stems. Flowers have a pinkish color before turning blue. Each flower has five petals fused into a tube. Foliage dies back to the ground in early to mid-summer as the plant goes dormant. Attracts hummingbirds, butterflies, and other pollinators. (Source: Penn State Extension)

Height: 12 to 18 inches

Bloom color: Pink, blue, purple

Bloom time: late March to early May

Hardiness zone: 3 to 9

Salt tolerance: Not tolerant

Spreading habit: Rhizomes and self-seeds

Sun: Sun/partial shade

Soil: Neutral (pH 6.8 to 7.2), rich, moist, sometimes rocky soils

Hydrologic zone: Moist, inundation tolerant

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Agent Note

Hello, Woodford Countians! Happy (almost) Spring!

It seems there is always some confusion as to the actual date of Spring. Some say it begins on March 1, while others say March 21. Which is it?

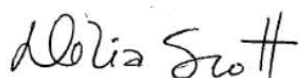
Astronomically speaking, this year's spring or vernal equinox will occur on Thursday, March 20 at 5:01 EDT. The astronomical spring equinox occurs when the Sun crosses the celestial equator going south to north. The Northern Hemisphere and Southern Hemisphere both receive roughly equal amounts of sunlight. The first day of astronomical spring falls either on March 19, 20, or 21.

Meteorologically speaking, the official first day of spring is March 1. Meteorological spring is based on annual temperature cycles rather than on the position of the Earth in relation to the Sun. Meteorologists divide the year into quarters in order to compare seasonal and monthly statistics from one year to the next, so meteorological spring runs from March 1 to May 31 each year.

Whichever day you choose Spring to begin, March is the month when we can finally start to get our hands dirty out in the garden, with some of our early spring crops (peas, spinach, beets) ready to be direct seeded outdoors as soon as March 8 here in central KY. For a more complete garden calendar, see pages 19-20 of [ID-128, Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky](#) below.

We have several upcoming events and programs on the Calendar of Events. And please remember - we are here to help and are always just a phone call or email away.

**"In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt."
- Margaret Atwood**



Delia Scott, CEA for Horticulture



Getting started with composting

Source: Rick Durham, Department of Horticulture
extension professor

Composting is a great way to add valuable organic matter to your soil while reducing the amount of yard and food waste that ends up in landfills. It's also something that is remarkably easy to do.

Compost is the result of a natural process where decaying organic substances, such as plants, are broken down by microorganisms. This produces a nutrient-rich, organic material that you can apply to your lawn or garden, much like you would a commercial fertilizer.

You can start a compost bin or pile in your backyard. You can purchase a bin or make one using inexpensive, leftover materials like pallets or chicken wire. The bin can be as big or small as you want, but for most rapid composting, a pile that is at least one yard tall, one yard wide and one yard long is best. Make sure to place your compost in an area that is flat and well-drained.

When the compost area is ready, collect yard waste and food scraps. Yard waste can include twigs, shrub trimmings, grass clippings, leftover straw and leaves. Most fruit, vegetable, and grain scraps are compostable as are coffee grounds, herbs, nuts and eggshells. Avoid meat scraps, oils and dairy products. You need to have a mixture of "brown" material (dried leaves, straw, twigs, coffee grounds, even cardboard) and "green" materials (fresh grass clippings, vegetable scraps, other fresh plant materials) for the composting process to work.

Mix or turn the pile once a week to help speed the breakdown of organic materials. If the compost pile is extremely damp, turn it more often. If it is dry, add some water or fresh plant material. It can take four to six months to complete the composting process. You will know it's finished when the compost is dark brown, crumbly and smells like soil.

Compost can be used in the vegetable garden or spread around ornamental plants in the landscape, but be careful not to use too much. A one-inch layer of compost, worked into the top few inches of soil, will feed plants for several months.

More information on composting is available at the Woodford County Office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.



From KY Pest News

Dr. Nicole Gauthier, UK Plant Pathology Extension Specialist, has developed a video highlighting a new disease that affects strawberries, *Neopestalotiopsis* (*Neopest* for short). This disease was first reported in Kentucky in 2024. This video overview of *Neopest* disease will help growers understand how the fungus infects, spreads, and overwinters in Kentucky. Watch the video below.



Are you interested in growing elderberries? Follow the link below to a survey from UK to be put on a list to learn more and be notified of upcoming trainings.

Elderberry is a crop that fits in well on a small-scale farming operation. It is a perennial plant that grows to be a large shrub each year. Harvesting occurs over a 2-month period in mid- to late-summer in Kentucky. For more information on growing elderberries, see UK's Center for Crop Diversification page below.



Buzzing for Bee Club

Local opportunity to get hands-on learning
about our fuzzy buzzy best friends!

3rd Wednesday each month

5:00PM Hive Inspection

6:00 PM Club Meeting

RSVP:

Attending EITHER or BOTH
Hive Inspection | Club Meeting

For further info, contact Joe Lacefield

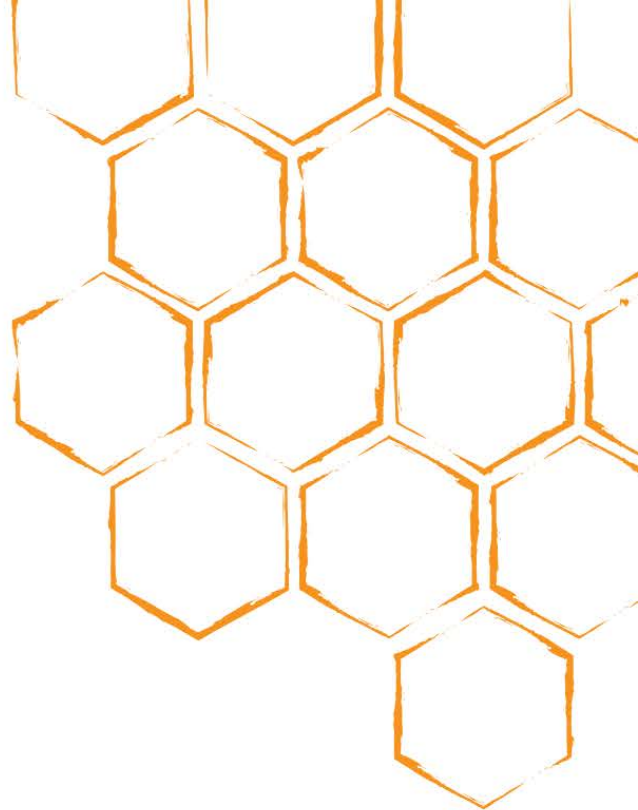
KY Dept. of Fish & Wildlife

180 Beasley Road, Versailles, KY 40383

Phone: (859) 879-8411

Email: joe.lacefield@ky.gov

RSVP: tfaragher@windstream.net



Calendar of Upcoming Events

March
15

Spring Gardening Workshop at the
Woodford County Extension Office

March
19

Buzzing for Bee Club at the
Woodford County Extension Office

April
1

Woodford Co. Monarch Waystation
Grant applications open

April
26

Earth Day Tree Giveaway at
Falling Springs Park

May
10

Annual Master Gardener Plant
Sale at Falling Springs Park

What is the Difference between Cool Season and Warm Season Vegetables?

Source: Amanda Sears, Agent for Horticulture, Madison Co. Cooperative Extension Service

Cool season plants grow best with a relatively cool air temperature (50 to 60 °F). These plants are the first ones to be planted in the garden season and then can be replanted in the fall. They grow well during the short and cool days of spring and fall. They can be planted several weeks up to a couple of months before the last frost date (around May 10th). Plant cool season crops as soon as the soil is workable in the spring. If planted too late in spring, the heat of summer will reduce their quality. They may become bitter, have lower yields, or bolt (form flowers and go to seed). Light frost will not injure them. Many cool season crops can be sown in early spring and again in fall. For fall planting, they must be planted early enough to reach maturity before winter weather, although there are a few winter hardy vegetables. Some of the best quality vegetables are produced during fall's warm days and cool nights. Plants grown in the fall have a higher sugar content and better flavor. Examples of cool season vegetables include asparagus, beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, chives, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, Swiss chard, kale, leek, lettuce, onion, parsnips, peas, radishes, spinach, and turnips. Warm season vegetables should be planted after the threat of frost has passed. These plants require warm soils and air temperature for growth and fruiting. They grow best with long warm days and mild nights. The growing season in our area is too short to allow for some warm season crops to be directly seeded in the garden. For example, if you plant a tomato seed, it will take 60-80 days to reach maturity depending on the variety. To be able to get tomatoes earlier in the season they are started indoors and then transplanted to the garden once the danger of frost has passed. Examples of warm season vegetables include beans, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, melons, peppers, zucchini and summer squash, pumpkin and winter squash, sweet potato, and watermelon.

Garden Calendar Quick Tips: March

- Clean and sharpen garden tools.
- Vegetable gardens are awakening! Only work soil when crumbly. Squeeze a handful of soil into a ball and drop it from waist height. If it crumbles easily, the soil is dry enough to work. If not, wait for drier times as wet soil will form hard clods.
- Incorporate organic matter such as compost into garden soil to improve soil structure.
- Remove old stems from rhubarb and asparagus and fertilize with nitrogen, compost, or rotted manure.
- Gradually harden off vegetable seedlings grown indoors 2 weeks before planting outdoors. Each day, increase the plant's time outside by a few additional hours each day and then eventually work up to 24 hours a day for a couple of days to help toughen them up.
- Time to plant cool crops in the garden! These include beets, cabbage plants, carrots, chard, collards, kale, lettuce seed and plants, onions, peas, potatoes, radishes, spinach, and turnips. The earliest safe planting date for some of these crops begins March 8 for central Kentucky.
- Warm season crops such as tomatoes, eggplant, and peppers can be started indoors on March 25.
- Prune and fertilize brambles and blueberries.
- Plant pansies and other cold tolerant flowers.
- Use sunny days to begin landscape bed clean-up. Be careful not to tread on emerging plants. Cut back perennials and ornamental grasses. Most ornamental grasses can be divided at this time.
- Seeds of hardy annuals such as larkspur, bachelor's buttons, Shirley poppies, and California poppies should be direct sown in the garden now.
- Prune back roses.

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<https://www.facebook.com/woodfordCEShorticulture>

Woodford County Extension Master Gardener Page:
<https://www.facebook.com/WoodfordCountyMasterGardeners>