

Weed It and Reap

FRANKLIN COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION NOVEMBER 2022 NEWSLETTER



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Kentucky Shrubs and Vines for Birds

By Joyce Fry, Capital Area Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Whether or not you're an avid "bird watcher" (simply, "Birder," now), you may still care about birds and other wildlife. Do you ever wonder how they make it through the late fall and winter months? Well, it can be tricky for them. Much land is in private hands, including farm, suburban, urban, retail, and industrial lands. They depend upon our land use and management.

One day during fall migration, I walked through an industrial park after dropping my car off at my mechanic's shop. As far as the eye could see was nothing but mowed fescue and a few horticultural shrubs. That habitat provides very few benefits for wildlife. I noted a northern cardinal, northern mockingbird, starlings, and a Carolina wren in a narrow row of trees and bush honeysuckle (invasive and nonnative). A fall-migrating bird coming migrating to South America would not stop in this habitat because there is nothing of value for it to eat.

Migrating birds require a lot of nutritious, energy-packed foods to make the 3,000-to-5,000-mile trip. Some birds migrate twice a year; once in the spring from Central and South America to the U.S. and Canada. They migrate then because food resources are more abundant during spring and summer in North America than in Central and South America, their over-wintering habitat. Once they have reached their preferred region, they choose their nesting sites. More bird songs are heard in the spring and

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summer as birds establish and maintain nesting and foraging territories. Courting, breeding, nesting and feeding young requires a lot of energy. In order to reproduce successfully, these birds must consume nutritious food sources, such as those provided by native plants. In the fall, after their young have grown enough to be independent, migrating birds make the reverse trip back to where they overwintered.

Birding along our driveway here in Northern Franklin County, I experienced a completely different and much more rewarding event. On this fine fall day, I was thrilled by the sights and sounds of a migrating flock of about 40 cedar waxwings as they descended upon the plentiful Eastern red cedar trees (*Juniperus virginiana*), ravenously devouring the abundant edible blue berries. In fact, the cedar waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) derived its name from its affinity to the cedar tree.

What kind of shrubs and vines provide food for fall-migrating birds in Kentucky? Luckily, there are some of these left undisturbed on farms, in

yards and abandoned, undeveloped lands. Additionally, there is a growing awareness of the importance of native plants species in our habitats, prompting many landowners to “rewild” their yards by planting them.

In 2019, ornithologists estimated that up to 3 billion birds have been lost due to habitat loss and pesticide use since 1970. That’s an alarming decline. If you are concerned about this devastating downward trend, you can help them by leaving existing or planting native shrubs and vines on your property. Below, are some examples of those species that provide birds nutritious foods in the fall.

These are just a few of Kentucky’s shrubs and vines that provide fruits throughout the fall and sometimes into winter. If you have any of these, consider leaving them; if you don’t, plant them. The birds will benefit and, subsequently, so will you, knowing that you have helped them in their plight, and perhaps by enjoying their lovely songs and unique beauty.

Common name	Scientific name	Shrub/Vine	Fruit
Virginia creeper	<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	vine	berry
Frost grape	<i>Vitis vulpina</i>	vine	berry
Raccoon grape	<i>Ampelopsis cordata</i>	vine	berry
Greenbriar, sawbriar	<i>Smilax rotundifolia/S. glauca</i>	vine	berry
Poison ivy	<i>Toxicodendron radicans</i>	vine	berry
Possum-haw	<i>Ilex decidua</i>	large deciduous shrub or small tree	drupe
Black-haw	<i>Viburnum prunifolium</i>	shrub	berry
Winterberry	<i>Ilex verticillata</i>	deciduous shrub	nutlet (seed)
Spicebush	<i>Lindera benzoin</i>	shrub	berry
Common elderberry	<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>	shrub	fruit pome
Black chokeberry	<i>Aronia melanocarpa</i>	shrub	fruit pome
Buttonbush	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>	shrub	nutlet (seed)
American bittersweet	<i>Celastrus scandens</i>	vine	drupe
Strawberry bush	<i>Euonymus americanus</i>	shrub	seed
Wild honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera dioica</i>	vine or sprawling shrub	seed
Fragrant sumac	<i>Rhus aromatica</i>	shrub	drupe



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USING NATURAL DYES AT HOME

Did you know you can dye your own clothes with your garden? Join local wool producers as they show us the process of dyeing fiber naturally!

Tues. Nov 15, 2022

6:00 PM

Franklin Co Extension Office
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Winter is for Witchhazel

by Amy Aldenderfer, Agent for Horticulture, Hardin Co. Cooperative Extension

The cold winter season is enough to keep many plants, and most gardeners, in a state of suspended animation patiently waiting for warm breezes and bright sunshine. But, among these droves of winter evaders, there is one with the fortitude to tempt ‘old man winter’ and produce not solely a plump bud or a greenish stem, but a flower with fragrance and style unlike any other blooming shrub. The plant is Witchhazel and it is the hero of a winter garden.

The name witchhazel has little to do with witches or hazels. The word “witch” is a derivative of the word “wych” meaning pliable or flexible. During colonial America, the pliable forked branches of witchhazel made for favorite divining rods of dowsers searching for hidden water sources or precious metals.

There are five species of witchhazel – two native, two from Asia, and one hybrid. Most witchhazels used in landscapes are cultivars of the hybrid. Even still there is reason to consider the others. Both natives, for example, are unique as one is the last shrub in our area to flower, the other the first.

The Common Witchhazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) is native to the eastern United States and commonly found along forest edges, sometimes on floodplains and along boggy or rocky streams. It is a large shrub or small multistemmed tree with a broadly rounded form growing to 20 feet tall. Its leaves are dark, glossy green, about 3 to 6 inches long, turning to yellow to deep orange in the fall. Unlike the other witchhazel species, the common witchhazel blooms in the fall after all its leaves have dropped. In late autumn and winter, the squiggly yellow petals of fragrant flowers appear. Each of the long petals is narrow and crumpled, looking not unlike the legs of a spider or octopus. The fruit that develops will ripen the following

summer and have a unique means of mechanical distribution. In other words, when they are ripe, the seed capsules explode apart with a cracking pop and catapult seeds up to ten yards from the shrub.



The Common Witchhazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) is one of the last shrubs to flower in Kentucky. The spidery, yellow flowers are fragrant

Our other native, Vernal Witchhazel (*Hamamelis vernalis*) is the earliest-flowering shrub blooming during the warmer days of winter and persisting into spring. Its flowers are extremely fragrant but less noticeable due to their small size and the plant’s habit of holding onto last year’s leaves which effectively mask the blooms. The blooms are variable in color from yellow to orange to a rusty color. Each petal is thin and thread-like with the ability to roll up and withdraw as a survival mechanism to avoid freezing damage. This shrub is smaller than the common witchhazel, maturing at 8 to 10 feet tall and wide. Fall color is chartreuse most years but golden-yellow in good years. Vernal Witchhazel is very adaptable to a wide range of soil types, sunlight exposures, and moisture conditions.

Witchhazels have a unique place in the landscape. Not unlike the daffodils that herald in the spring, witchhazels give us a reason to stir during the hardest part of winter and the hope of warmer days ahead.

How Poinsettia Diseases Can Ruin the Holiday

By Kim Leonberger, Plant Pathology Extension Associate and Nicole Gauthier, Plant Pathology Extension Specialist

Poinsettia are holiday decorations in public and personal spaces. No holiday décor is complete without at least one. However, numerous plant diseases can act as a Grinch to steal holiday cheer. Proper plant selection and maintenance are important for a disease-free poinsettia that will last well into the New Year.

Poinsettia Selection

Inspect all plant parts prior to purchase. Development of disease symptoms may occur over long periods of time. Early symptoms are easy to overlook as they are often small and underdeveloped.

Assess bracts (colorful, flower-like structures) and leaves for spots and damage. These spots can be the start of diseases, such as scab and Botrytis blight. Both of these diseases can cause tan to gray-brown spots on bracts and leaves (Figure 1) and ultimately result in plant dieback and defoliation.



Figure 1: Leaf spot symptoms caused by scab. (Photo: John Hartman, UK)

Stems can also become infected by disease-causing pathogens. Bacterial diseases (such as, bacterial soft rot and bacterial canker), as well as, fungal diseases (Botrytis blight, scab, and Rhizoctonia root and stem rot) can damage stems. Lesions often develop on stems near the soil line (Figure 2). Since stem infections limit the plants ability to move nutrients and water throughout the plant, symptoms such as

wilting, dieback, and defoliation may be observed.



Figure 2: Stem lesion caused by bacterial stem canker disease. (Photo: Cheryl Kaiser, UK)

If plants can be removed from the pot, inspect roots for damage and decay. Pythium root rot, black root rot, and Rhizoctonia root and stem rot can all impact roots. They result in blackened, fragile roots that are unable to support the plant. When roots are damaged, upper plant parts cannot be supported, resulting in wilting and dieback.

Plant Maintenance & Disease Management

- Maintain plant health and vigor with proper nutrition, light, and watering practices.
- Water at the base of the plant to avoid splash.
- Remove plants from decorative pot covers. These may hold water.
- Drain saucers immediately after watering. Do not allow plants to sit in water. Overly wet soils can lead to root rot disease issues.
- Remove and destroy any leaves or plant parts that are dead, discolored, or deteriorating.
- Avoid crowding. Space plants to increase air circulation.
- Dispose of any plants that show disease symptoms.
 - Once plants become infected, management options are limited.
- Root and stem rots cannot be treated or cured.
- Leaf spots and blossom symptoms can be managed by removing infected plant parts and maintaining plant health. The life the plant can often be extended through the holiday season.
- If disease is severe, the plant should be discarded, especially in situations where additional plants are at risk for infection.

Composting Fall Leaves

by Rick Durham, Horticulture Specialist, University of Kentucky

As the fall season progresses, many folks obtain large amounts of leaves and other yard wastes that need to be removed from their property.

When you compost leaves, other yard debris and kitchen waste, a microbial process converts these items into a more usable organic amendment. You can use finished compost to improve soil structure in gardens and landscape beds. You also can use finished compost as a mulch to help reduce weed problems, moderate soil temperatures and conserve soil moisture.

Composting yard and kitchen wastes also reduces the volume of material going into landfills. Yard and kitchen wastes comprise more than 20 percent of the waste generated each year. By composting these wastes, you help reduce disposal costs and extend the usefulness of landfills. This increases the return on your tax dollars.

Weeds free of seed heads and residues like vines and pruned limbs make a good addition to a compost pile. It is not necessary to remove grass clippings if you follow proper lawn management practices. If you decide to compost grass clippings, mix them with other materials like leaves or brush. You also can compost many kitchen scraps such as fruit and vegetable peelings and cores, coffee grounds, tea bags and crushed eggshells. However, avoid cooked foods, meat, bones, fat or dairy products because they attract animals.

Put your compost pile on a well-drained site that will benefit from nutrients running off the pile. If you are just starting to compost, prepare the pile in layers of materials. This will ensure the proper mixing of materials to aid decomposition. If your compost material contains no soil, sprinkle a little soil or a compost starter in each layer to inoculate the pile with microorganisms. Ideally, the pile should be 1 cubic yard (3 by 3 by 3 feet). To ensure good aeration and drainage, occasionally put down a 3-inch layer of coarse plant material like small twigs or chopped corn stalks, or use a wooden pallet.

The composting process can be completed in one to two months if materials are shredded, turned to provide good aeration, kept moist and supplied with nitrogen and other materials that cater to compost-promoting microorganisms. Otherwise, it may require 12 months. Periodically turn the compost pile once a month or when the center of the pile is noticeably hot. The more often you aerate, the more quickly you will have useable compost. Compost is useable when it fails to heat up after turning.



Shredding leaves with a mower, chipper, or shredder helps the leaves break down into a usable compost by next spring. Leaves can still be used as a mulch next spring if not broken into small pieces.

Adequate moisture is essential for microbial activity. Water the pile so it is damp but does not remain soggy. Your compost pile should have the moisture content of a well-squeezed sponge, so you can squeeze a few drops of water from a handful of material. It is especially important to supply water during dry periods and when you add leaves and other dry materials to the compost pile.

If the pile emits an ammonia smell, it is too wet or packed too tightly for oxygen circulation. Turn the heap and add some coarse material such as small twigs to increase air space. Compost is one of nature's best mulches and soil amendments, and you can use it instead of commercial fertilizers. Best of all, compost is cheap. You can make it without spending a cent. Using compost improves soil structure, texture, and aeration and increases the soil's water-holding capacity. Composting improves both your property as well as environment.

Overwinter dahlia tubers with care

By Rick Durham, extension professor, Department of Horticulture



Dahlias are an amazing addition to the garden, but they can be quite pricey.

Dahlias, with their lush, vivid blossoms, are a garden favorite and often take front and center at county and state fair competitions. Unfortunately, they are semi-tropical plants and will not overwinter in Kentucky's climate. Don't worry, though. With a little effort in storing their tuberous roots properly, you can enjoy your dahlias year after year—and maybe bring home a blue ribbon or two in the process.

Dig only your healthiest plants. Roots from any plant that may have shown signs of a virus should end up in the trash. Virus symptoms may include streaked or mottled foliage, distorted leaves or flowers, or stunted growth. You don't want disease to spread among your healthy dahlias next year. While some people dig their dahlias before the first frost, it is often best to allow them more time in the ground to mature as much as possible. Though a frost may damage top foliage and blooms, roots will continue to mature and toughen up through a light frost and often through the first hard freeze, depending on how deep into the soil that freeze went.

Cutting the tops off a few days before digging the tuberous roots will allow the eyes to come out, which makes it easier to accurately divide the

clumps. Water is a tuberous root's enemy, so many people will cover the freshly cut tops with aluminum foil to prevent water from getting into the crown until they can dig them.

Be careful when digging and handling the tuberous roots. Dig into the soil on all four sides of a clump, about 12 inches from the stalk. Using either a shovel or fork, gently lift the clump, then turn it upside down to drain any water from the stalk. If you lift them in the morning and leave them out to air dry for a couple of hours, they will not be as fragile. Then, using a hose, you can wash off the dirt without damaging the tubers.

The clump of roots could be stored as is, but it's usually easier to divide the clumps in the fall when they are softer. If left to spring, some clumps can become so hard they can be almost impossible to cut. Remove all the small feeder roots and stems, which can promote root rot during storage. When you cut the clumps, look for the eyes. Each division should have a crown with an eye. If the inside of the crown shows brown or rusty spots, cut those away. Those spots probably indicate crown rot, and the tuberous root won't make it through the winter. To avoid spreading virus between plants, dip your cutting tools into a solution of one-part bleach and 10-parts water or spray them with a disinfectant after dividing each clump.

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Digging the tubers in the fall protects them from winter freezes.

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After making each division, dip the cut ends into a fungicide and let dry. Drying time will depend on temperature and humidity but could take between 24 and 36 hours depending on the size of the cut.

Store your tuberous roots in a medium that maintains a decent, but not excessive moisture level. Storing tubers in coarse vermiculite in a plastic bag is one of the preferred methods. Check occasionally to ensure rotting is not occurring and mice or other rodents have not compromised your dahlia stash.



Broccoli Chowder

2 tablespoons canola oil	3 cups broccoli florets	all-purpose flour
½ cup chopped onion	½ teaspoon dried Italian seasoning	3½ cups low sodium chicken broth
3 cloves garlic, finely minced	½ teaspoon salt	½ cup half-and-half
½ cup chopped carrots	¼ teaspoon pepper	½ cup low-fat, shredded cheese
2 cups diced, unpeeled red potatoes	3 tablespoons	

In a large heavy pot, **heat** the oil over medium heat. **Add** the onion and garlic and **sauté** 2-3 minutes. **Add** the carrots, red potatoes and broccoli one at a time; **sauté** each about 2 minutes. **Add** the Italian seasoning, salt, pepper and flour and **toss** until vegetables are coated. **Cook** 1-2 minutes. **Add** the chicken broth and bring to a boil. **Reduce** heat to low, **cover** pot and **simmer** for 15

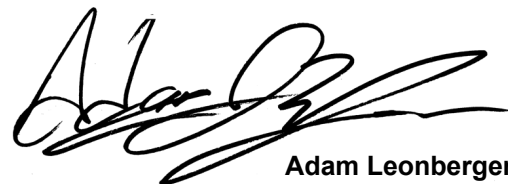
minutes. **Remove** lid and **stir** in the half-and-half. Bring back to a **simmer** and **remove** from heat. **Ladle** into bowls and top with cheese to serve.

Yield: 8,1cup servings

Nutritional Analysis: 180 calories; 8g total fat; 2.5 g saturated fat; 15 mg cholesterol; 340 mg sodium; 18 g total carbohydrate; 3 g dietary fiber; 4 g sugar; 8 g protein.



Buying Kentucky Proud is easy. Look for the label at your grocery store, farmers' market, or roadside stand.



Adam Leonberger
County Extension Agent for Horticulture Education

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