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# By The Yard...

HORTICULTURE

Fayette  
County

## Get an Early Start on Spring Gardening

You don't need to wait for warm weather to start your vegetable garden. Several types of vegetables can be started as early as March. Radishes, spinach, cabbage, broccoli, lettuce, onions and many more vegetables are all quite frost tolerant, and you can seed or transplant them in the garden from mid March to early April.

If you want to get an even earlier start, you could try covering an area with clear plastic film to create a mini greenhouse where plants will thrive. To try this season-extending technique first work up the soil for your plot and stretch some black plastic over the area for a couple of weeks. This will help warm the soil and give seeds and transplants an added boost. After a few weeks under black plastic, the soil will have warmed a few degrees, and you can prepare the bed for planting and transplanting. Once planted, you should install a wooden or

metal frame over the bed and cover it with clear polyethylene film. Anchor the film at the base with boards, bricks or soil, but remember that occasionally you will have to remove the poly to tend to the plants and to harvest the crop.



For this reason, it's best if you don't permanently attach the plastic to the frame. It will also be necessary to open sections of the covering for ventilation on warm sunny days. You can easily accomplish this by designing the ends

of the covering so you can easily open or remove them during warm weather. For more information on early spring gardening techniques or other gardening topics, contact the Fayette County Cooperative Extension Service at (859) 257-5582. For additional info consider our **Gardeners Toolbox** class on "Extending The Growing Season" on March 17 at 6:00 p.m.

## Battery Recycling

A joint effort between the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government (LFUCG) Environmental Commission, Bluegrass PRIDE (Personal Responsibility In a Desirable Environment), and Good Foods Market and Café is underway to collect household batteries for recycling. Accepted batteries include alkaline, lithium, nickel cadmium, nickel metal hydride and lithium ion. **Wet batteries and car batteries will not be accepted.**

Proper disposal of batteries is important because they contain heavy metals such as mercury, lead, cadmium, and nickel, which

can contaminate the environment when batteries are improperly disposed of. Batteries that end up in landfills can leak, potentially polluting ground water and soil.

Battery drop-off locations are The Arboretum, Bluegrass PRIDE, Good Foods Market and Café, and the **Fayette County Extension Office, 1140 Red Mile Place**. At the time of drop off, each battery should be placed in a separate plastic bag. If plastic bags are not available, terminal ends must be taped using electrical or masking tape.



# Saving or Replacing Damaged Trees

The ice storm is long past and spring has arrived bringing the threat of strong storms. If your trees have suffered from one or both of these events, how do you decide whether to save or replace them?

Your first consideration is a tree's loss of ability to feed itself through its leaves. A loss of 25 to 30 percent of a tree's leaf-producing branches is similar to hard pruning and really won't set the tree back that far. But a loss of 50 percent or more may be too much for the tree to recover.

A second consideration is the size of injuries formed as a result of tree breakage. If the main trunk broke and a large gaping wound resulted, the tree probably can't be saved.

Decay fungi enter tree wounds and work their way up and down from the damage site. New rings of growth will retard the fungi from growing outward with the tree, but you may be left with a hollow center. This could cause the tree to fail later.

If one or both of these considerations convinces you to replace the damaged tree, grind out the stump and wait until fall to plant the new tree. Waiting allows the remains of the tree to rot away and gives you time to choose a good replacement tree.

Take some time to think about what tree you will plant. Replanting a tree gives you a chance to choose a better tree for the site. Many of the trees we enjoy today were planted by our father's or grandfather's gen-

erations. This is your chance to leave a tree for your children and grandchildren.

When choosing a street tree for an urban environment, it makes sense to follow the 10-20-30 rule. To promote diversity and disease resistance, communities should plant no more than 10 percent of their street trees of any one species; no more than 20 percent of one genus; and, no more than 30 percent of one family. When too many of the same kind are planted they are more susceptible to being wiped out by a single disease. Try to plant different trees than the neighborhood next to you.

If you decide to save damaged trees you need to take action now. The wound needs to be cleaned up. Remove any stubs back to the next branch while carefully maintaining the branch collar. The branch collar - the thickened bark around the base of the branch - contains most of the biochemical reactions that the tree will need to defend itself against disease.

When cutting off branches be sure to take big branches down in pieces and make proper cuts to keep their fall from tearing bark off the tree. Better yet hire a licensed, bonded and insured tree service to do the pruning for you.

*Source: John Hartman; Writer: Janet Eaton*

## Spiced Red Cabbage

1/2 medium head red cabbage,  
chopped  
1 tablespoon vegetable oil  
1/2 cup chopped onion  
2 medium tart apples, cut into quarters  
3 tablespoons tarragon vinegar



or red wine vinegar  
1 tablespoon sugar  
1 bay leaf  
1 teaspoon salt or to taste  
1/4 teaspoon pepper  
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves

Boil the cabbage in water to cover in a large stockpot for 1 minute. Drain and return the cabbage to the stockpot. Add the oil, onion, apples, vinegar, sugar, bay leaf, salt, pepper and cloves and stir to mix well. Simmer, covered, until the cabbage is tender. Discard the bay leaf before serving.

*Yield: 6 servings, Calories: 80; Protein: 1 g; Carbohydrate: 15 g; Total Fat: 3 g; Percent of Calories from Fat: 27; Cholesterol: 0 mg; Fiber: 3 g; Sodium: 396 mg.*

## March Timely Tips



- Sow grass seed. First half of the month is ideal but you can seed all month with good results. Turf type tall fescue is your best choice. Dwarf varieties equal less mowing.
- Feed bulbs a balanced fertilizer now to promote nice blooms next year. Do not cut leaves down after flowering. They provide food for the plant. Let them die naturally.
- Vegetable gardens are awakening. Only work soil when crumbly. Squeeze a handful of soil into a ball. Drop it from waist height. If it crumbles easily soil is dry enough to work. If not wait for drier times as wet soils form hard clods.
- Remove old stems from rhubarb and asparagus. Fertilize with nitrogen, compost or rotted manure.
- Time to plant cool crops in the garden. These include: asparagus, beets, cabbage plants, carrots, chard, collards, kale, lettuce seed and plants, onions, peas, potatoes, radishes, spinach, and turnips
- Repot houseplants. Increase pot size gradually. Plants may be fed a weak fertilizer solution (one quarter strength)
- Plant pansies and other cold tolerant flowers.
- Use sunny days to begin bed clean up. Be careful not to tread on emerging plants.
- Cut back perennials and ornamental grasses. Most grasses can be divided at this time. Grasses are very woody and may require an ax.
- Prune and fertilize Brambles and blueberries.
- Clean out birdhouses or if you don't have any, now is the perfect time to hang a few.



## Pruning Fruit Trees Has Many Advantages

Some of your fruit trees best friends are pruning shears and loppers. Using these tools properly will help you control pests and promote production of high-quality fruit.

Fruit trees benefit from an annual pruning from the time they're planted on for years to come.

Prior to spring growth, prune out dead, diseased or insect-infested wood to reduce pest problems during the growing season. Pruning increases air movement within the tree canopy. This reduces the amount of time foliage remains wet from rain or dew and lessens the likelihood of diseases that develop under wet conditions. You also will get better spray coverage in an open canopy than a heavily shaded one.

Pruning also promotes high-quality fruit production. Moderate pruning each year helps open up the tree and allows sunlight to penetrate the plant canopy, encouraging formation of fruit buds for next year's crop and promoting high quality fruit for this year

Wait to prune fruit trees until the worst of winter weather is over. Late February or early March usually is the best time to prune.

Don't leave stubs because they serve as an entry point for diseases and can slow down the healing process. Contrary to popular belief and advertising, wound dressings don't promote more rapid healing of pruning cuts. The wound will heal just fine if left untreated.

Remember, the extent to which you prune young fruit trees will influence the onset of fruiting. Trees need foliage to grow and develop so pruning too severely will delay the time trees start to produce a crop.

However, taking time to properly prune and train a young fruit tree will pay off with production of high-quality fruit later.

For more information on producing and maintaining fruit trees, contact Fayette Cooperative Extension Service, (859) 257-5582.

*Source: Richard Durham*



# March Featured Plant- Ming aralia - *Polyscias fruticosa*

Not all houseplants are created equal. Many popular houseplants require such high light and humidity levels that finding an indoor location to meet their needs is virtually impossible. I do not want to give the impression that plants can live in dark corners with no water, but some plants are simply very durable and capable of handling less than ideal light conditions. The Ming aralia falls into this category. I have a large aralia in my office near a north east facing window. The growth is slightly more lax and extended than I would prefer but it still thrives and makes an impressive specimen. I receive so many compliments and inquiries that I felt compelled to feature it here.



The very lacy, delicate appearance of the foliage would lead you to believe it must be delicate and difficult to grow but the truth is they are quite easy. In years past the most difficult part of growing a Ming aralia was locating one. Fortunately they are not only a bit easier to locate but also far more affordable than in years past. There are many different forms of aralia with varying leaf types and textures. Most have a very upright habit although they can be trained to be broad and spreading. A location near a bright window would be ideal but they will even tolerate a northern exposure. For optimum health and vigor you may wish to summer your plant outdoors in a

shady location.

One possible alarming occurrence is that of leaf drop, both naturally in the fall and winter, and that brought on by missed watering. In both cases the plant generally recovers without major setback. The plants like to dry slightly

between watering but it is possible to let them go too long without a drink and this will nearly always result in leaf drop. They are far more tolerant of drier conditions than overwatering which can kill them outright. Fertilization is best done in spring and should be done lightly, roughly one quarter the recommended strength. Aralias do not have extensive root systems and do not require excessively large pots. They perform well when slightly pot bound. They do best with a loose, organic soil. Most high quality commercial growing mixes are ideal.

For clarity's sake, I am not aware of any plant that is truly indestructible. I do not mean to say aralias can thrive on total neglect but, if you would like to try your hand with a durable houseplant whose exotic good looks belie it's iron-clad constitution, Ming aralia just might be your ticket.



## Some Pest Management Tips for Home Vegetable Gardens

Now is a good time to start thinking about pest control for your home vegetable garden.

You can control pest problems, and perhaps prevent future difficulties, in your garden by doing some advance planning and following a few simple Integrated Pest Management practices. IPM promotes minimal pesticide use and emphasizes use of all available pest control methods including cultural, mechanical and biological practices to prevent pest problems. Examples of the IPM approach include using plants with natural disease tolerance or resistance, using mulch to control weeds or row covers to

prevent insect damage and using naturally occurring organisms such as lady beetles or praying mantis.

Sanitation is another good IPM practice. Keep your garden well-groomed during active growth. Once you spot diseased plant material, remove it immediately to keep diseases from spreading. Also, promptly remove vegetable plants when they cease to be productive. Although you should clear out unproductive vegetable plants from the garden area, you can add this plant material to a compost pile. Be sure to eliminate dead vegetable plants in late fall because these can serve as overwintering sites for insects

# Some Pest Management Tips for Home Vegetable Gardens (Continue)



and disease organisms in your garden.

Before you buy seeds, plants or fertilizer, start your garden off right by answering these questions.

Have you taken a soil sample to determine if soil fertility and acidity/alkalinity will meet plant nutrient requirements?

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Soil test results will let you know how much fertilizer is required to provide plants with needed nutrients, while preventing excessive use that contributes to groundwater, stream and lake pollution. Plants that are stressed or weak from insufficient nutrients or a pH that's too low or too high are more susceptible to disease and can't readily tolerate insect damage. So, to give your plants a healthy start; soil test and apply the fertilizer and other amendments according to the recommendations.

**Do you plant your garden crops in the same spot year after year?**

Crop rotation can help prevent insect and disease build-ups. For example, potatoes, eggplant, tomatoes and peppers are subject to the same insect and disease problems. Therefore, none of these crops should be planted in the same location more than every three consecutive years. After three years, switch to a different crop like beans or corn. If you have limited garden space, plant some vegetable plants in containers such as large pots or half whisky barrels as a form of crop rotation.

Make a diagram of your garden each year to avoid planting the same or closely related crops in exactly the same spot too frequently.



**How do you select a vegetable plant variety?**

Whether you are planting corn or tomatoes, check to see that the variety you are planting has some disease resistance or tolerance. For example, select tomato varieties labeled AVFN,@ as they're resistant to Verticillium Wilt, Fusarium and root-knot nematodes. Whereas, a tomato variety leveled AV@ is only resistant to Verticillium Wilt.

**Do you buy the cheapest transplants?**

When it comes to transplants, the best buys are the healthy ones. A healthy transplant was seeded at the right time, grown at the proper temperature, and received adequate light and moisture. It will have a compact growth structure with very small distances between leaves. The leaves will be dark green, large and upright with no tendency to droop. Stems will be pencil thick and rigid.

Avoid transplants that are beginning to produce flowers or fruit. It might seem that buying a plant with blooms or fruit will give you a head start in the garden.

However, plants trying to produce fruit or flowers are slow to develop the good root systems needed to support later fruit production. Never buy plants that have insects present or are showing disease symptoms.



**Do you plan to use mulch in your garden?**

Mulch helps prevent weeds that will decrease your garden's production by competing with the vegetable plants for water, nutrients and sunlight. In addition, some weeds harbor diseases and insects that attack vegetable plants. Mulch also helps conserve soil moisture.

Several types of commercial mulch are available, or you can use newspapers for the mulch. Start with five to eight layers, adding more layers as the newspapers decompose to prevent weed growth throughout the growing season. Be sure to use only newspapers printed with soy-based ink and avoid using the glossy inserts.

If you can't determine what is causing a pest problem in your established garden, contact the Fayette Cooperative Extension Service, (859) 257-5582. We can help you discover what's causing the problem, or send the plant or pest to one of the University of Kentucky Plant Disease Diagnostic Labs for identification.

For more information, request our publication, Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky (ID-128). It is available from your local Extension Service office, or from the UK Web site at <http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id128/id128.htm>.

Remember, planning ahead and using IPM practices will help prevent pest problems in your home vegetable garden.

Sources: *Patty Lucas and Richard Durham*



**WINTER WEATHER POLICY:**  
If Fayette County Schools are closed for winter weather all Horticultural activities will be cancelled.

# Kids Corner - Making a Terrarium



A small garden in a glass container is easy to make and to care for. Many different containers and plants can be used—whatever is available to you. In addition to plants, you can add rocks, shells, or pieces of bark to create miniature scenes. This indoor gardening activity can give pleasure to you and your family or friends during the winter when few green plants or colorful flowers can be found outdoors. Also, a terrarium is a good idea for a gift.

## You Will Need:

You will need containers, soil, fertilizer (optional), drainage material, charcoal, and plants. There are also many options for accessories for your terrarium.

## Containers:

You will need a glass container clear enough to see through. Cloudy or tinted glass reduces the amount of light the plant receives. Any size container will do, depending on the number of plants you are using. The container should have a removable cover to control moisture. A piece of glass or plastic can be used if your container does not have a lid.

## Soil:

Enough soil is needed to make a 1½-inch to 2-inch layer in the bottom of the container. The soil should be porous to allow good drainage. It should be slightly moist for planting. Here are possible potting mixtures:

- Wood soil if available or mix.
- Equal parts of garden soil, sand, and peat moss.
- Prepackaged garden soil mixture from the local garden center.

## Fertilizer (Optional):

Soil should not be too fertile so the plants will not outgrow the container. One level teaspoon of 5-10-5 fertilizer can be mixed with each 2 quarts of soil.

## Drainage Material:

Gravel is needed to prevent soil from becoming too wet.

## Charcoal:

Crushed charcoal will keep your terrarium from having a bad smell.

## Plants:

Woodland plants and houseplants may be used but not in the same terrarium. Use small plants that grow slowly. Plants should fill the container but not crowd it. If possible, collect plants from a nearby woods or see what a local greenhouse or garden center has to offer. When removing plants from the woods, do not mutilate the area. Only take plants that are plentiful in the area. Never completely strip an area of any plant. Line the container with wood moss, and add some of the suggested plants:

*House Plants:* English Ivy, Small Ferns, Philodendron, Begonias (small-leaved), African Violets,

*Woodland Plants:* Reindeer Lichen, Small Ferns, Mosses, Pipsisewa, Rattlesnake Plantain, Partridgeberry, British Soldier, Ground Cedar

## Accessories (Optional):

Rocks, Bark, Fungi, Small Figurines and/or Shells

## What to Do

1. Wash and polish the container and its top.
2. Line the lower quarter of the container with wood moss. Put the green side next to the glass. This will hide the soil.
3. On top of the moss, place a few pieces of charcoal and ½ inch to 1 inch of gravel as shown.
4. Add soil until it is slightly above the moss.
5. Decide how to place the plants. If the terrarium is to be viewed from all sides, place taller plants in the middle and lower ones around the outside. If it is to have a front and back, place taller plants in the back and smaller ones toward the front so that all plants can be seen well.
6. Scoop out soil to make holes for the plants. Set the plants in position, and press the soil gently around the roots.
7. Clean the soil from the plant leaves.
8. Add accessories, if you are using them.
9. Sprinkle soil lightly with water.
10. Cover the container, but place the lid so there is a small opening for air to get in.
11. Place the container in bright light but not in direct sun. A northeast or north window is best. Direct sun will make the air inside the terrarium too hot, and the plants will die.
12. Water the terrarium only if the soil seems dry. Usually only a few teaspoonfuls of water once a month are needed.
13. Rotate the terrarium occasionally to give a balanced form to the plants.
14. If the sides of the container become foggy, remove the lid until they clear.
15. Remove dead leaves and overgrown plants.

*Source: Madge Balden Adams, former special assignment writer for Horticulture.*

