

January 2009

HORTICULTURE

Home Hort Hints **GROW VERTICAL VEGETABLES**

Dr. Leonard P. Perry, Extension Professor
<http://pss.uvm.edu/ppp/articles/vertgard.html>

Many gardeners now have smaller gardens, either from lack of space or from lack of time to tend larger areas. If you're one of these, or if you just want to try something novel, the National Garden Bureau has some suggestions for gardening vertically.

Growing vegetables upright not only saves space, but makes harvesting easier. You don't have to stoop to cut fruit from the vines. This could be quite a saving for older gardeners or ones with back problems.

Upright vegetables also add an architectural interest. The garden ceases to be just ordinary and utilitarian, and becomes aesthetic as a well-planned perennial border might. They can also be grown on fences to hide ugly chain link ones, or to screen undesirable views.

Pole beans (make sure you don't get the bush varieties) will climb up just about anything, even other plants. Native Americans used these in their traditional "three sisters" plantings of beans, corn, and pumpkins. The corn stalks provided support for the beans, and the pumpkins (or other squash) provided a groundcover or living mulch below. Just make sure if using this method to give the corn a head start, or the fast-growing beans won't have anything to climb!

Pole beans can also be grown on bamboo teepees, trellises, or over an arbor. The scarlet runner bean is old-fashioned, and has attractive red flowers. There is even a variety of this now with yellow leaves-- a nice contrast with the red flowers. Pole beans don't just add a vertical accent, but they keep producing longer than bush beans. They continue to grow, flower, and fruit as long as you keep picking the pods.

Gourds and winter squash are cousins from the same family, with very long vines-- up to 25 feet for the gourds and up to 10 feet for the squash. Both take a long season to mature, so in the colder northern gar-

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dens, give these a head start indoors in peat pots that can then be planted out. Heavy fruits of winter squash, such as butternut, should be individually supported by cloth twine (strips of used panty hose works great too) tied to the trellis or fence on which the vines are trained. For tying these and other vertical crops to their supports, avoid string which can cut into stems. Use a soft rope or cord such as cotton clothesline, or one of the thick and soft gardening ropes made just for this purpose.

Melons can be grown similar to winter squash, and their fruit similarly supported with cloth twine or even slings made of old towels, sheets, or rags. Use old-fashioned or patterned fabric for an additional decorative touch to the vertical garden.

Cucumbers (the traditional vining types, not the newer bush types) can also be grown up a trellis or A-frame structure. You can also make a cage of the
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JOIN THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

Count for Fun, Count for the Future

<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>

Bird and nature fans throughout North America are invited to join tens of thousands of everyday bird watchers for the 12th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), **February 13-16, 2009**.

A joint project of the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](http://www.cornell.edu/ornithology) and the [National Audubon Society](http://www.audubon.org), this free event is an opportunity for families, students, and people of all ages to discover the wonders of nature in backyards, schoolyards, and local parks, and, at the same time, make an important contribution to conservation. Participants count birds and report their sightings online at www.birdcount.org.

"The Great Backyard Bird Count benefits both birds and people. It's a great example of citizen science:
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Anyone who can identify even a few species can contribute to the body of knowledge that is used to inform conservation efforts to protect birds and biodiversity,” said Audubon Education VP, Judy Braus. “Families, teachers, children and all those who take part in GBBC get a chance to improve their observation skills, enjoy nature, and have a great time counting for fun, counting for the future.”

Anyone can take part, from novice bird watchers to experts, by counting birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and reporting their sightings online at www.birdcount.org. Participants can also explore what birds others are finding in their backyards—whether in their own neighborhood or thousands of miles away. Additional online resources include tips to [help identify birds](#), a [photo gallery](#), and special materials for educators.

The data these “citizen scientists” collect helps researchers understand bird population trends, information that is critical for effective conservation. Their efforts enable everyone to see what would otherwise be impossible: a comprehensive picture of where birds are in late winter and how their numbers and distribution compare with previous years. In 2008, participants submitted more than 85,000 checklists.



“The GBBC has become a vital link in the arsenal of continent-wide bird-monitoring projects,” said Cornell Lab of Ornithology director, John Fitzpatrick. “With more than a decade of data now in hand, the GBBC has documented the fine-grained details of late-winter bird distributions better than any project in history, including some truly striking changes just over the past decade.”

Each year, in addition to entering their tallies, participants submit thousands of digital images for the GBBC photo contest. Many are featured in the popular online gallery. Participants in the 2009 count are also invited to upload their bird videos to YouTube; some will also be featured on the GBBC web site. Visit www.birdcount.org to learn more.

Businesses, schools, nature clubs, Scout troops, and other community organizations interested in the GBBC can contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at (800) 843-2473 (outside the U.S., call (607) 254-2473), or Audubon at citizenscience@audubon.org or (215) 355-9588, Ext 16.



The Great Backyard Bird Count is made possible, in part, by support from [Wild Birds Unlimited](#). ■



Happy Groundhog Day?

Thomas G. Barnes, UK

Extension Wildlife Specialist

Groundhog Day is on February 2, and this fun holiday makes groundhogs seem cute and friendly, but for some, these rodents are a nuisance!

Often called a groundhog or whistle pig, the woodchuck (*Marmota monax*) is one of Kentucky’s most abundant mammals. Woodchucks rank fourth in game animals pursued throughout Kentucky and provide a tasty meal when boiled or fried.

When woodchucks move from abandoned pastures and odd areas into fields, gardens and orchards, they can damage home gardens or vegetable crops, especially beans, peas, and squash. They can damage fruit trees by gnawing or clawing on the trunk. Their burrowing activities also create holes and mounds of soil, which present hazards to livestock, farm equipment, and humans.

Woodchucks are members of the squirrel family. When these heavy-bodied rodents are surprised, they emit a loud, shrill whistle and dive into a burrow; hence the name whistle pig. Adult woodchucks weigh between 5 and 10 pounds. Like other rodents, they have a pair of large, chisel-like front teeth.

Woodchucks use burrows for mating, hiding from predators, and hibernation. One branch of the burrow system leads to a nest chamber containing dried grass. This dead-end nest chamber is sealed with soil during the winter and serves as a hibernation chamber.

Woodchucks are most active during early morning and late afternoon when they are feeding. They are vegetarians and eat a variety of broad-leafed weeds, including dandelions and plantain. Woodchucks are particularly fond of legumes, including alfalfa and vetch, clover, peas, and beans. When not actively feeding, woodchucks can be seen basking or dozing on rocks, stone fences, and logs during the warmest part of the day.

In late August and September, woodchucks have voracious appetites as they prepare to hibernate. This begins in October and continues through February. After hibernation, males usually emerge first and may travel some distance in search of a mate. Once a mate has been located, breeding occurs during March. In April, four to five young are born. The young woodchucks remain in the den for about two months.

Woodchucks are not great travelers. They usually do not range more than 50 to 100 feet from the den, although their home range may exceed 40 acres. Most

activity is concentrated around the burrows.

Preventing and Controlling Woodchuck Damage

Control is most effective in the spring, when active burrows are easily located, young woodchucks have not yet scattered, and there is less likelihood of damage to other wildlife. The most effective types of woodchuck control are shooting, trapping, and fumigation. Fencing may help reduce woodchuck damage; however, woodchucks are excellent climbers and can easily crawl over fences. No poisons are registered for controlling woodchucks in Kentucky.

Shooting- In rural areas, woodchucks can be easily controlled by shooting them with a rifle. Shooting provides sport for hunters as well as a source of edible meat. Woodchucks are considered a varmint and may be legally shot anytime of the year if they are damaging your property.

Trapping- Live traps, Conibear traps and steel leg hold traps are effective in capturing woodchucks. Trapping is the best method to use near buildings or where fumigation may create a poison or fire hazard.

Fumigation- Gas cartridges that produce poisonous gas (killing by suffocation) are one of the most common methods of woodchuck control. These cardboard cylinders must be ignited and placed in the burrow system. **Because of potential fire hazard and gas accumulation in homes, never use a gas cartridge in burrows under homes, tobacco sheds, buildings, dry grass, or near other combustible materials.** Fumigation is most effective February through April. **Never use a fumigant in a manner inconsistent with its labeling. Failure to comply with directions may subject you to severe federal or state penalties.**

For complete information on controlling ground hogs, log on to <http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/for/for44/for44.htm> or call the Extension Office. ■

Starting Seeds at Home



Vegetables grown in areas with short growing seasons or ones that take too long to mature need to be started indoors in order to get a good head start before moving outside, said a University of Illinois Extension horticulture educator. "Planting time for vegetable seeds started indoors depends on when the seedling needs to be transplanted in the garden," said Maurice Ogutu. "This time may vary from four to 14 weeks."

For example, if the indoor start is done in relation to the last frost, the times are as follow:

10 weeks--broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and head lettuce; Seven weeks--tomato, eggplant, and pepper;

and Four weeks--cucumber, muskmelon, squash, and watermelon.

"Starting vegetable seeds indoors ensures that high percent germination is achieved through provision of optimal conditions for seed germination," he said. "Some vegetable seeds are very expensive particularly hybrid varieties, so starting them indoors ensures that seed loss due to rodents or poor weather is minimal. Vegetables established from transplants tend to mature much earlier than direct-seeded ones."

To start, select the vegetables you want to launch indoors and buy treated seeds. Such treatments as damping off control fungal diseases that attack seedlings.

"Test the germination percentage of the seeds by placing some of the seeds on a moist paper towel, and setting it in a warm environment with plenty of light," he said. "Check after six to seven days, depending on how long the seed of a particular type takes to germinate and count the germinated seeds and express it as a percentage of the total number of seeds tested. You need to plant seeds based on a germination percentage so that you can get the required number of plants for transplanting in the garden."

It is important also to read the information on the seed packet for each variety or type of vegetable. Follow directions on the seed packet about when to start the seeds, light requirements, relative humidity requirements, and temperature requirements.

"Get materials such as pots, trays, plastic flats, peat pots, and potting mix for starting the seeds ready or buy seed starter kits from local garden centers or catalogues," he said. "Containers or trays for starting seeds need to have drainage holes on the bottom. When starting vegetable seeds in a tray or pot, cover the holes on the trays with peat moss before filling with potting mix or soil. A good potting mix or soil for starting vegetable seeds needs to be light, loose, disease-free, insect-free, weed-seed-free, have good water-holding capacity, and well-drained."

Fill trays, flats, and pots with potting mix or starting media and level gently. Place the filled-up tray, flat, or pot on a pan of water overnight so that water can soak into the potting mix from the bottom. If trays are used, make shallow rows about one to two inches apart when starting different kinds or varieties of vegetables and label each row after seeding. Broadcast when starting one type of vegetable in a seed tray.

"Plant the seeds uniformly by pressing them gently into the starting media according to the planting depth recommended on the seed packet," he said. "Cover the container with plastic film or a piece of window glass to retain the moisture until the seeds germinate. Do not place covered containers in direct sunlight. Place the containers in a warm location with optimum temperature range of 65 to 75 degrees F for most vegetables. Some cool-season vegetables such as cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, and peas tend to do well when started at temperatures of about 55 degrees F. After germination, remove the plastic film or glass cover and move the cool-loving plants to a cooler location."

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KIDZ

CORNER



Photo Courtesy HGTV.com

Materials

- stockings
- peat moss or potting soil
- grass seed
- coffee cup
- permanent paint
- glue
- buttons, plastic eyes, beads
- yarn
- other decorations (use your imagination!)

Step 1: Create the base

First, cut off the bottom of the stockings and use the foot part only. Fold the edges of the stocking foot over the rim of your coffee cup. Add a small handful of grass seed to the very bottom, inside the stocking. This is where the top of the grass head will be, and where the "hair" will sprout. Take handfuls of peat moss or soil and push them down inside the cup until you have a tightly packed ball of soil.

Next, remove the stocking from the cup, and tie a knot in the stocking to secure the ball shape. Turn the ball upside down, with the knot on the bottom, and you have the basic grass head. Now it's time to give your grass head a face!

Step 2: Decorate the grass head

Now this is where the fun really begins. Anything goes when decorating grass heads. You'll need things like plastic eyes, paints, beads, toothpicks, and don't forget yarn, which comes in very handy for making noses. For the nose, just pull a little piece of the stocking forward until you have a small bulb of fabric, then use the yarn to tie the nose in place.

Step 3: Water the grass head

Once all the paints and glue are dry, the last step is watering your grass head. Put it in a tray of water so the peat moss or soil gets completely soaked. Then prop it up in a cup to drain. Just make sure you give it another good drink every few days.

After about three to four weeks of watering and keeping your grass head in a sunny location, it will sprout a full head of hair.



<http://www.hgtv.com/landscaping/grass-head-for-kids/index.html>

Grass Heads!

Here is an easy project for kids that can be done indoors for gardening fun and learning. Make a Grass Head out of old stockings, potting soil, and grass seed. Follow the instructions below. Be sure to take pictures and send them to the Extension Office with your results!



Photo Courtesy Yates.com

Starting Seeds At Home (continued from page 3)

Inspect the plants for damping off disease and remove infected plants and drench the media with recommended fungicides. Incidences of damping off can be minimized by sanitation and avoiding overwatering of the plants.

Place the seedlings where there is bright light, particularly a bright south-facing window, or use two fluorescent light bulbs (one cool and one warm white bulb) and place the seedlings three to four inches from the tubes for 14 to 16 hours per day. Adjust the space between the fluorescent bulbs and the seedlings as the plants become larger.

"Good air humidity is an asset in starting plants, and a humidifier may be put closer to the area where plants are being started," he said. "Do not overwater plants but ensure that plants are not wilting.

"Feed the plants with water-soluble house plant fertilizers at half the recommended rate once every two weeks. After the appearance of true leaves, if the seeds were planted in individual containers or flats, then thin the plants to the desired number per pot or cell by removing weaker plants."

At this stage, you can transplant seedlings into individual pots or larger containers or transfer to a hotbed, if one is available. Vegetables that can easily be transplanted from one container to another are broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, lettuce, and tomatoes. Some vegetables such as cauliflower, celery, eggplant, onion, and pepper have slower root development and are not as easily transferred.

"Most of the warm-loving vegetables such as cucumbers, muskmelon, squash, and watermelon do not transplant well so they are seeded directly into larger cells or pots where they grow until reaching a size that can be transplanted in the garden," said Ogutu.

Before transplanting seedlings in the garden, it is important to make the plants ready for outdoor conditions. "This is achieved by hardening the plants," he said. "Harden the plants two weeks before transplanting by moving them to a shaded area outdoors or by placing them in a cold frame. Then, move them gradually to sunlight for a short time during the day. Increase the length of exposure with time.

"Do not expose seedlings to freezing temperatures or strong winds. Reduce watering and after proper hardening, plant them in the garden by carefully removing them from the containers."

For more information log on to: <http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/ho/ho56/ho56.htm>, or call the Franklin County Extension Office and ask for publication HO-56, Starting Plants from Seed At Home. ■



WEBLINKS

<http://www.natureserve.org/explorer/> an authoritative source for information on more than 70,000 plants, animals, and ecosystems of the United States and Canada. Explorer includes particularly in-depth coverage for rare and endangered species.

<http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants/alphalist.html> Cornell University's list of plants poisonous to livestock

<http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/4000/4031.html> Organic Lawn Care from The Ohio State University Extension

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/MG/MG08600.pdf> Basic Principles of Landscape Design

<http://www.se-eppc.org/ky/list.htm> Ky Exotic Pest Plant Council- learn more about plant invaders that may be in YOUR landscape!



Calendar of Things To Do!

February 24, 2009 - Community Garden Forum, 5-7pm, Franklin Co Extension Office. Are you interested in starting a community garden in your neighborhood or with a community group? Come and hear success stories and talk with Community Garden organizers from Frankfort, and learn more about how to get a group garden growing. Contact the Extension Office, 502-695-9035, email Kim.Cowherd@uky.edu. Free.

February 28, 2009—Salato Wildlife Education Center; Salato Center Scavenger Hunt; Beat the winter blahs by taking a fun scavenger hunt around Salato. We will provide scavenger hunts for all ages. Registration and pre-payment are required. Contact Kristi Stroud, 502-564-7863 ext. 4498; Kristy.Stroud@ky.gov; Cost per person, \$10.00

Events at The Arboretum, Lexington, Ky. Contact (859) 257-6955, <http://www.ca.uky.edu/arboretum/index.php> for more information.

- * **Designing with Plants: A Course for Homeowners** ; This course will take you through the steps of home landscape design from site assessment to drawing your plans on paper. Six in-depth sessions will be taught by a team of professional landscape designers. You'll gain practical tools for dealing with a variety of landscape challenges. Course schedule and descriptions of each session follow below. **First class on January 29th.** Course cost: \$60 (\$50 for Friends of The Arboretum) Pre-registration & payment required; call 859/257-9339.
- * **Founder's Lecture: Gene Bush, "Ten Months of Color in the Shade Garden Thursday, February 26 at 7:00 p.m.** Gene Bush of Munchkin Nursery and Gardens in DePauw, Indiana will talk about shade gardens. A well known writer and lecturer, his main interests are in shade gardening using rare and unusual plants and in native and non-native perennials. \$5 (Free to Friends of The Arboretum and Students with a valid ID)
- * **Orchid Workshop Saturday, March 7 at 10 a.m. – 12 noon.** Orchid expert Susan Umberger will reveal the secrets of orchid care in this workshop. See a variety of orchids, learn where to find these special plants and how to keep them blooming. You'll pot up your very own orchid to take home and enjoy. Workshop fee includes orchid, potting media, and pot. Susan Umberger is a Master Gardener & Past-President of the Bluegrass Orchid Society. Pre-registration & payment required; call 859/257-9339. Cost: \$30 (\$27 for Friends of The Arboretum)

A NOTE FROM KIM:

January and February can be the coldest and darkest months of the year- and January 2009 certainly proved that to be true! You can think about Spring by looking over your gardening books, catalogs and websites and plan your garden now! Many mail order plants can be pre-ordered and there are seeds that can be started soon. Try forcing bulbs or bringing in early flowering branches, like forsythia, for forcing indoors.

Also check out the calendar for gardening classes to get ideas and talk with gardening experts!
Happy Gardening!

Kim Cowherd

FIREWOOD INSECTS

by Lee Townsend, UK Entomology

The main message for Kentuckians this winter – buy local firewood and don't bring firewood from other states. This is a major way that the emerald ash borer can be spread into new areas. A variety of native creatures find Kentucky firewood a great place to live or hide for the winter. Consequently, it is easy to bring them indoors when stocking wood to burn. The warmth stirs them to activity and they can provide some temporary excitement but little in the way of problems. Firewood inhabitants usually belong to one of two groups: 1) shelter seekers and 2) wood-infesting insects. **Shelter Seekers** Many arthropods hide under loose bark or in cavities during the winter. Possibilities include beetles, wood cockroaches, and even overwintering wasp or hornet queens. Spiders and their egg sacks, praying mantis egg masses, and moth cocoons are part of the "life" that may be associated with trees or fallen logs. These creatures will become active after warming up indoors. They can be swatted and discarded as they appear. These insects are not able to survive for extended periods indoors and they will not multiply or become established in the home.

Wood Infesting Insects Many insects attack stressed or dead trees. Their activities ensure that the resources in the wood are broken down and recycled. Beetles are the most common group found developing in firewood. These include roundheaded wood borers, flatheaded wood borers, and shothole borers, also called powderpost beetles. The legless, white larval stages of the first two types can be found while splitting logs. Piles of sawdust appear from small holes in logs infested by powderpost beetles. The potential for these insects to infest structural wood in the house is very low. Often these borers attack only certain types of wood and the moisture content must be much higher than that found in structural wood. Sometimes adults emerge after logs are brought indoors. Roundheaded wood borers are brightly marked, fast beetles with long antennae. The elongate flatheaded woodborers often have a metallic sheen. Powderpost beetles are small, brown to black insects. Any of these may be seen crawling or flying in the room or accumulating at windows or light fixtures as they move to light. These insects are harmless. Carpenter ants and termites may also be found in firewood that has been wet or stacked in one place for a long time. Termite colonies are in the soil so only workers are found in the wood. Termites form mud tunnels and this mud can be found in wood that they are attacking. Carpenter ant galleries are very clean, with no mud or sawdust. Individuals brought into the house in logs will not start an infestation but a colony may exist in old wood piles outdoors. Insect invasion of homes from firewood can be reduced by following these rules: Inspect wood as you pick it up. Check surfaces that were on the ground or against other pieces. Brush off

the creatures that you see and knock wood together to dislodge what you don't see. Bring in small supplies that will be burned in a few days rather than large amounts that could stay in place for weeks. Outdoors, avoid stacking the wood directly on the ground, especially right beside the foundation. This will keep it from getting too wet and reduce the chances for infestation by termites and ants. ■



Adult Round Headed Wood Borer



Adult Carpenter Ant

Home Hort Hints (continued from page 1)

Heavy wire used to reinforce concrete. This will be quite strong, stand up on its own, and support the weight of the vines. You can also use cages of wide-mesh fencing, only this will need additional support such as wooden stakes or iron rods. I prefer the latter as they don't rot and will last outdoors almost forever. They can be found, and cut to your size needed, at many complete hardware stores.

If using stakes of bamboo, decorative rods, or the rusty-colored iron rods, make sure and purchase "cane toppers". These can be plastic or ceramic, just a ball or a decorative structure. They don't just add to the aesthetics, but also function to protect your eyes when working around them.

Peas of course are a favorite early season, upright crop suitable for the vertical garden. Choose the edible-pod or snow peas that produce longer vines than most shelling, or English peas. And since they produce early in the season during cooler weather, combine them with later maturing vines such as beans or cucumbers. Or you may sow peas again in late summer for a fall harvest.

Tomatoes that have stems that keep growing-- the indeterminate varieties (check the seed packet or description for this feature)-- perform much better grown upright than sprawling over the ground where the fruits can be damaged by disease and insects. You'll need a sturdy stake for them, and tie them to it at intervals with soft twine. There are also many types of sturdy wire or metal supports you can buy to support tomatoes. ■

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Quibbles 'n' Bits

"A FLOWER IS AN EDUCATED WEED." [Luther Burbank](#)

"FLOWERS IN A CITY ARE LIKE LIPSTICK ON A WOMAN- IT JUST MAKES YOU LOOK BETTER TO HAVE A LITTLE COLOR." [Lady Bird Johnson](#)

"The love of flowers is really the best teacher of how to grow and understand them." [Max Schling](#)

"Trees are the earth's endless effort to speak to the listening heaven." [Rabindranath Tagore](#)

"BREAD FEEDS THE BODY INDEED, BUT THE FLOWERS ALSO FEED THE SOUL." [The Koran](#)

Contact the Franklin County Extension Office at (502) 695-9035 if you would like to receive our newsletter via email or email requests to gil.thurman@uky.edu or kim.cowherd@uky.edu
If you **DO NOT** want to receive this newsletter or your address is incorrect, please notify us immediately.