

Sequatchie Valley Master Gardeners

A Program of the University of Tennessee Extension Sequatchie and Bledsoe Counties

April 2025

Gardening News and Notes

2025 Tentative Dates

- April 26, 2025 MG Meeting – Dunlap
- May 3-4, 2025 Valley Fest, Dunlap
- *July Tomato Tasting – Pikeville
- November 1, 2025 MG Meeting – Dunlap
- *Tentative date to be discussed

2025 Programs

Watch for emails with dates, times, and locations

- January 28 – April 29, 2025, Master Gardener Intern Class, 9:00 AM CST, Sequatchie County Fair Building
- Wildlife Damage Management for lawn, garden, and home. April 22, 2025, 6:00 PM Central at the Sequatchie County Fair Building
RSVP at <https://forms.office.com/r/1m6yWJyEpP> or email sdbarker@utk.edu

Home Garden Vegetable Trial

For information about how to join the 2025 trials, visit mastergardener.tennessee.edu/home-garden-vegetable-trial.

Information on Citizen Science Research Behind the Home Garden Vegetable Trials

You are invited to participate in a research study. You will be asked to complete this form that should take about 5 minutes of your time. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study other than those encountered in everyday life. All individual data will be kept confidential and submission of this evaluation is completely voluntary. Information about plant performance will be used by Extension to assist gardeners and growers in selecting crops and cultivars. Results will be used in the aggregate in scientific presentations and publications as well as Extension materials. No reference will be made in reports to link participants to the study unless individual permission was granted for a photo or quote. If you have questions at any time about the study please contact Dr. Natalie Bumgarner at nbumgarn@utk.edu.

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

Sheldon Barker
Extension Agent, Sequatchie Co.
170 Church St
Dunlap, TN 37327
423-949-2611

[UT Extension Sequatchie County web page](#)
[Sequatchie County Facebook](#)

J. C. Rains
Extension Agent, Bledsoe Co.
PO Box 289
Pikeville, TN 37367
423-447-2451
[UT-TSU Extension Bledsoe County Webpage](#)
[Bledsoe County Facebook](#)

The University of Tennessee is an equal opportunity provider.

Master Backyard Poultry Program Offered

Learn the Basics of Backyard Poultry



The University of Tennessee Extension Sequatchie County will be offering the Master Backyard Poultry Class Tuesdays beginning May 20, 2025.

The five-session program will be Tuesdays May 20 – June 17, at 6:00 PM at the Sequatchie County Fair Building. The Cost of the program is \$100.00. Pre-registration is required, and the deadline is April 22, 2025.

Anyone interested in backyard poultry, beginner or experienced, will find the program useful and is welcome to participate.

The Master Backyard Poultry Producer program focuses on developing producers' skills and knowledge in backyard poultry production focusing on topics such as:

- Biosecurity & Disease Control
- Management – Husbandry
- Housing
- Environmental Management
- Regulations

Besides the educational opportunities the program will allow you to meet and network with other producers and educators. Learn more at <https://tiny.utk.edu/SeqPoultry>, you can pre-register at the site as well.

Contact the UT Extension Sequatchie County office at 423-949-2611 or email Sheldon Barker at sdbarker@utk.edu for details.



UT Gardens Plant of the Month

What's in a Name? Native Spigelia Performs Well in Most Situations

UT Gardens' April Plant of the Month

Submitted by Holly Jones, horticulturist, UT Gardens, Knoxville



Spigelia marilandica or woodland pink is bright red and adapts to most growing conditions, including the UT Gardens, Jackson, at the West Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center.
Photo by C. Scott, courtesy UTIA.

Both Latin and common names for plants are often descriptive, offering clues about the way a plant grows, the color of the flowers or even the environmental conditions it prefers. And then there are names like *Spigelia marilandica* or woodland pink that have obscure connections to the plant they represent.

I can forgive the famous taxonomist Carl Linnaeus for veering away from a logical naming practice. Anyone who names more than 12,000 plants over the course of their career should be allowed to name a few after exemplary people like he did with anatomy professor Adriaan van den Spiegel, who inspired the genus name *Spigelia*. But I find it hard to justify the choices made by his contemporary plant explorers who indulged their obsession with pinking shears to come up with the common name Woodland Pink for a plant with bright red

tubular flowers that open at the top with yellow petals in the shape of a star with zero pink color to be found. Botanical forefathers, this plant deserved better!

Other common names include Indian pinkroot and worm grass, which both offer a mixed message reference to the medicinal properties found in its white colored roots. Native Americans, and later European settlers, used the root as an effective vermifuge to treat intestinal worms. While I prefer meaningful names to help me remember plants, I'm adding this one to my mental files under "shake my head," and instead I will remember the plant for its many outstanding qualities in the garden.

Spigelia marilandica is native to a large chunk of the Eastern and Midwestern United States, where it grows in open woodlands and along streambanks and wetland edges. In the garden, this translates to adaptability to most growing conditions. For areas with high sun intensity, it is best to provide a bit of afternoon shade and additional moisture to prevent leaf burn. But otherwise, you can grow this well-behaved, long-lived perennial flowering plant in almost any situation.

Brilliant red flowers emerge atop handsome glossy green leaves on 18- to 24-inch-tall plants in early June, providing sweet nourishment for hummingbirds and butterflies through late July. Cut back plants by about a third after the first flush of blooms for sporadic reblooming up until the first frost.

There are multiple cultivars available on the retail market. 'Little Redhead' and 'Ragin Cajun' are both slightly more compact and floriferous than the straight species. The flowers on 'Ragin Cajun' are more of an orange red color. 'Apple Slices' and 'Orange Slices' are two brand new varieties from Proven Winners. A well-established specimen of the straight species can be found in the shade garden at UT Gardens, Knoxville. It is also planted at the UT Gardens, Jackson.

The UT Gardens includes plant collections located in Knoxville, Crossville and Jackson, Tennessee. Designated as the official botanical garden for the State of Tennessee, the UT Gardens are part of the UT Institute of Agriculture. The Gardens' mission is to foster appreciation, education and stewardship of plants through garden displays, educational programs and research trials. The Gardens are open during all seasons and free to the public. For more information, see the Gardens website: utgardens.tennessee.edu.



Gardening Tips

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

Lou Erickson

May

- Plant butterfly weed (*Asclepias*), parsley, dill, rue, and pipevine to encourage butterflies in your garden. The foliage of these plants provides food for the caterpillars. *Aristolochia fimbriata* is a lovely ground-cover-type of pipevine that is covered each year by the pipevine swallowtail caterpillar at the UT Gardens, Jackson. It may be a little hard to find for sale, but it is worth seeking out.
- Early May is a good time to cut back bushy woody perennials, like rosemary, rue, lavender, Santolina and Artemisia.
- If you haven't done so already, prune spring-flowering shrubs (azaleas, flowering quince, Forsythia and Loropetalum), but only if they need it. To keep their forms more natural in appearance, as opposed to looking like a meatball, follow the taller branches down into the shrub and cut just above a joint.
- A good option for *Loropetalums* that have outgrown their space is to prune them into a tree-form. They easily can be limbed up by removing lower branches. *Loropetalum* 'Crimson Fire' is a dwarf form that has proven to be hard in all but the coldest part of Tennessee. As with all *Loropetalums*, they are best planted in spring or summer to insure proper establishment before the winter months. It will mature to 3-ft tall, and can be seen growing at the UT Gardens in both Knoxville and Jackson.
- Remove the flowering stalks on yucca as they begin to form if you dislike the look of the bloom. Cut them off down in the foliage at the source, and you won't even know they were there.

- Old flower stems can be removed from lungwort so not to distract from the lovely foliage.
- Caladiums and vinca need warm soil. Caladium tubers will rot in cool soil, and vinca will be disease-prone, or exhibit stunted growth. Night temperatures should regularly be above 60 degrees F before planting them.
- You can still direct seed easy-to-grow flowering annuals and vegetables. Some easy flowers to grow from seed include marigold, zinnia, sunflowers and cosmos. Beans, peas, corn and okra are some easy direct sow vegetables, while dill, basil and cilantro are some easy direct-sow herbs. If you prefer to get your garden green quickly, gardening shops have plenty of young plants available for sale. Before shopping for annuals, you may want to consult the UT Gardens Annual Herbaceous Plant Trial Program data to see which cultivars of your favorite plant performed the best. Results for the garden in Knoxville and Jackson can be found at utgardens.tennessee.edu/annual_trials.html.
- Azaleas often show symptoms of lace bug and spider mite infestations during the hot months of summer. This damage can be prevented by a one-time, early application of the systemic insecticide imidacloprid. This insecticide should be poured in liquid form around the root system as the flowers fade, spreading the active ingredients throughout the plant tissue where it remains effective through the growing season. Bayer Advanced Tree and Shrub Insect Control is a common brand that contains this safe and effective insecticide. Always follow label directions when applying any pesticide.

Vegetable Garden Task

- Harvest cool-season crops and watch for pests in these crops.
- Seed succession plantings of common warm-season direct seeded crops, such as beans and sweet corn. Some of the sweet corn cultivars that prefer warmer soil conditions may be best saved until this month. Okra seeds prefer 70 F soil temps to germinate as well.
- Prepare beds that will be in plastic mulch prior to planting transplants. Black plastic can warm the soil and speed early growth of transplants. Make sure that irrigation is provided if impermeable mulch is used. Sometimes natural mulches, such as straw, are applied a few weeks after planting as they can reflect light and actually slow soil warming.
- Continue transplanting warm-season crops. Peppers and eggplants prefer even warmer soil conditions than tomatoes and are often planted later. Make sure that young transplants are watered in and given a starter fertilizer solution to support early growth.
- Set up your irrigation system as transplants are placed in the garden. Drip irrigation is best to maintain dry leaves and reduce disease risks.
- Set up stakes, trellises, cages and support systems for your plants. It is best to have these set up at or soon after planting.
- Don't let weeds get started in the garden; take control early with mulches and proactive management.

Tennessee Gardeners Test Plant Varieties in Home Gardens

Participating in Citizen Science Benefits Gardeners Across the State

If you're trying to decide which beans, cucumbers, tomatoes and other vegetables to plant in your garden this spring, take a look at the varieties that were successful in your neighbors' gardens last year.

University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture researchers work with gardeners across Tennessee to test cultivars and varieties in their home gardens and report the results. In 2024, 182 participants representing 53 Tennessee counties planted 854 trials of bush and pole beans, cucumbers, okra, tomatoes, zucchini, squash and beets. Trials also included herbs, flowers and some fruits.

The results and recommendations are now available in the UT Extension publication [*Tennessee Home Garden Variety Trials 2024 Results*](#), by Department of Plant Sciences associate professors Natalie Bumgarner and Virginia Sykes. Bumgarner serves as the statewide residential and consumer horticulture Extension specialist, and Sykes is an expert in variety testing and agroecology.



Zinnias are among the flowers, vegetables and herbs Tennessee residents tested in their home gardens in 2024. The results of which varieties fared best are reported in a UT Extension publication. Photo by N. Bumgarner, courtesy UTIA.

“By involving Tennessee home gardeners in a citizen science approach to variety evaluation, we are able to see how varieties perform across many different locations and gather important data on attributes that make varieties valuable in a home garden, such as germination, plant health, yield, attractiveness and flavor,” Bumgarner and Sykes said.

Gardeners collect data on variety performance, which is compiled to identify varieties with superior performance in Tennessee. The idea is that trying new varieties leads to more productive gardens and healthier diets.

Participants tested and compared two varieties of each vegetable, herb or flower. When evaluating trials, participants were asked to mark which of the two varieties performed better in terms of germination, plant health, first fruit, yield, appearance and flavor. They were also asked to give a performance rating on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 indicating poor performance and 10 indicating excellent performance. Participants were asked to select whether they would recommend either variety to other home gardeners.

Heat, drought and swings in weather made gardening difficult across Tennessee last year, so varieties that performed well despite these challenges received high marks from participants. Cultivars that received some of the highest scores, more than 90 percent recommending them, were:

- ‘Buff Valentine’ for bush beans
- ‘Benery Giant Mix’ and ‘Cactus Mix’ for cutting zinnia
- ‘Seychelles’ for pole beans
- ‘Gateway’ for vining and slicing cucumber
- ‘Emperor’s Jade’ for green zucchini
- ‘Golden Star’ for compact zucchini
- ‘Prospera Red’ for basil
- ‘Firecracker’ for dwarf sunflower

For a full list of the trial results and recommended varieties from previous years, find the publication on the UT Extension publications website: utextension.tennessee.edu/publications. Search for the title or the term “variety trials.”

For information about how to join the 2025 trials, visit mastergardener.tennessee.edu/home-garden-vegetable-trial.

UTIA Experts Discuss Cost-saving and Shopping Strategies Amid High Egg Prices

Poultry Specialists Caution Against Starting Backyard Flocks to Save Money on Eggs



How long will eggs last in the refrigerator? What are the best ways to preserve eggs? Should I start a backyard chicken flock to save on eggs? When will the prices of eggs go down?

Questions like these have been frequent for researchers and faculty at the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture as egg prices continue to rise during the ongoing highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 outbreak.

Facts About Backyard Chickens

Tom Tabler, professor and Extension poultry specialist in the Department of Animal Science, has written several publications related to the outbreak and the impact on the poultry industry. One question he has been asked frequently is whether it would be a good

investment to start a flock of backyard chickens to offset the high cost of eggs. The short answer is no, if saving money is the goal.

“Backyard chickens are not the budget-saving salvation to high egg prices that they may seem at the moment. Eggs may be expensive, but backyard chickens are even more expensive, difficult to care for and a high-maintenance investment,” Tabler said.

Tabler and his colleagues from Tennessee State University, Mississippi State University and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture authored the publication, *“Backyard Chickens Are Not the Answer to High Egg Prices,”* to help dispel myths about backyard chickens offsetting the cost of eggs. They list several reasons to not have backyard chickens for this purpose:

- Chickens are expensive (including birds, feed, coop, outside run, accessories like feeders and drinkers).
- Chickens require constant care and protection.
- Chickens may not be allowed where you live.
- Caring for chickens is a steep learning curve if you have no experience.
- Biosecurity is essential to keeping chickens healthy.

“You want to get backyard chickens for the joy and pleasure they can provide you and your family (for a price), not for the disappointment when they turn out to be more work than you expected and cost more money than you had planned. If high egg prices are your only reason for considering backyard chickens, then reconsider now, before it’s too late,” he said.

Facts About Eggs

One of the reasons Tabler said egg prices have gone up is because it takes about six months to raise table egg layers (chickens that lay eggs to be sold in grocery stores or at farmers markets). If a bird in a commercial flock tests positive for HPAI, U.S. Department of Agriculture policy requires that every bird in the complex be euthanized to keep the disease from spreading. That means lost hens have to be replaced in order to start laying eggs again. It takes three weeks for a fertile hen egg to hatch into a baby chick. Then it takes about 20 to 22 weeks for the chick to become sexually mature to begin laying eggs. It takes a few weeks after that for the hen to begin laying Grade A large eggs. For example, table egg layers lost in January 2025 would not be replaced until July or August 2025 or longer.

There are currently about 300 million table egg layers in the United States, down from about a normal level of 400 million. Once an egg is laid at a commercial facility, it takes one to five days to reach the grocery store, Tabler said. Buying eggs from a farmers market or from a friend with backyard chickens should be safe so long as proper handling and cooking practices are followed. This includes cooking eggs to an internal temperature of 165 F until the yolks and whites are firm. “Hens with avian influenza die very quickly, within a day or two of contracting the

disease, and eggs from infected hens are not normal shape. They have wrinkled shells, or the shells are flat on one side or some other deformity that indicates something is wrong,” he said.

As mentioned in the publication, *“Biosecurity Is Critical to Prevent Avian Influenza,”* Tabler explains that the virus is spread by sick chickens to healthy chickens and transmitted through human interaction, contaminated feed and water, shared equipment, rodents and pets and wild birds, especially waterfowl. He recommends commercial and backyard growers adhere to biosecurity measures, including not having wild bird feeders or anything to attract ducks and geese.

Tips for Storing Eggs and Saving Money

The Department of Family and Consumer Sciences provides a wide range of helpful tips for healthy cooking, grocery shopping and meal planning. Kristin Riggsbee, assistant professor and nutrition and food safety specialist in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, has authored the publication, *“Eggs Uncovered: Storage Tips, Smart Savings and the Best Alternatives,”* to provide research-based advice for consumers.

Fortunately for consumers, shell eggs can be stored in the refrigerator for three to five weeks. Riggsbee, who is also a registered dietitian nutritionist and a licensed dietitian nutritionist, recommends consumers purchase eggs before the “Sell By” date printed on the carton. She said eggs should be stored in a refrigerator below 40 degrees in their carton and in the coldest part of the refrigerator, not in the door or in an egg holder.

Eggs can be frozen in order to preserve them for a longer time than refrigeration. Riggsbee recommends several ways to freeze eggs for up to one year:

- Whole eggs: break eggs and mix the yolks and white together and separate them into ice cube trays. Freeze until solid, remove and place in freezer bags.
- Egg yolks: break eggs and separate the yolks. Stir yolks together and pour into a jar with half an inch headspace at the top. Seal and freeze.
- Egg whites: break eggs and separate whites. Stir whites together and pour into a jar with half an inch headspace at the top. Seal and freeze.

Other preservation methods like water bath canning or pressure canning are not safe for eggs. “Caution is advised with practices like ‘water glassing,’ which may pose safety risks,” Riggsbee said. “This is the practice of adding pickling lime to eggs in a jar to make the food shelf stable; it was a common practice for families to stretch farm eggs during times when hens were not laying as frequently. However, this preservation practice is potentially unsafe and harmful for human consumption due to the potential contamination in the jar with salmonella.”

In the publication, Riggsbee also explains the health benefits of eggs and egg products and various terms like organic and cage-free that can be confusing to consumers and shows how to use fewer eggs or other products as alternatives. “Substituting eggs in baked goods can be tricky because you must consider the proportions of fats, proteins and moisture in the alternative ingredients,” she said. Some alternatives include applesauce, yogurt, banana, carbonated water, flaxseed and a combination of water, oil and baking powder.

For more information, access these UT Extension publications:

[D 250: Backyard Chickens Are Not the Answer to High Egg Prices](#)

[D 249: Avian Influenza Likely to Send High Egg Prices Even Higher Throughout 2025](#)

[D 251: Eggs Uncovered: Storage Tips, Smart Savings and the Best Alternatives](#)

[D 236: Biosecurity Is Critical to Prevent Avian Influenza](#)