

Sequatchie Valley Master Gardeners

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

February 2025

Gardening News and Notes

Tennessee Tree Day

Saturday, March 15, 2025

You will be able to reserve trees later this month. Check out <https://www.tectn.org/tennesseetreeday.html> for more details.

Master Gardeners should have an email on February 1, with a list of trees available from our allotment, contact Ken Lee, with questions and your order.

2025 Tentative Dates

- March 14, 2025 – 4:00 PM CST bundling trees and Tree Day setup
- March 15, 2025, Tennessee Tree Day - Dunlap
- 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
Invite a friend to join!
- March 18, 2025 – Growing Sweet Corn
- April 22, 2025 – Wildlife Damage Management for lawn, garden, and home
- April thru. May 2025 - Master Backyard Poultry

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

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UT Gardens Plant of the Month

February

The Pawpaw, North America's Largest Native Fruit, Is Regaining Popularity

Submitted by Karen Caspary, horticulturist and volunteer coordinator, UT Gardens, Knoxville



Pawpaws are eaten raw. The custard-textured pulp tastes similar to a cross between a banana and mango. Photo courtesy UTIA.

"Where oh where is dear little Susie? Way down yonder in the Pawpaw Patch...."

If you grew up in the eastern United States, you may have heard this folksong around the campfire. Once called "America's forgotten fruit," the common pawpaw tree (*Asimina triloba*) is a rich source of legends and lore, evoking bygone times and hidden places beside rivers and forest glens.

The pawpaw is and has always been a beloved food of the indigenous peoples of eastern North America; the botanical name *Asimina* originates from Algonquin-speaking peoples such as the Miami, Shawnees and Powhatans. It was said to be the favorite fruit of Daniel Boone and was planted by both Thomas Jefferson and George

Washington. Wild pawpaws fed untold thousands of travelers throughout the history of this land, including enslaved African Americans who escaped to the North. Many an old-timer will remember days spent gathering pawpaws, but sometime in the late 20th century the tradition fell from mainstream cultural awareness. In recent decades, thanks to the efforts of dedicated and talented researchers, as well as the curiosity of new generations, the mysterious pawpaw has come back into the forefront.

The largest fruit native to North America, the pawpaw is the only temperate member of the *Annonacea*, or custard apple family. Common pawpaw is primarily a bottomland species, growing wild in the low country along rivers and streambanks. It is an understory tree reaching between 15 to 20 feet at maturity, and it suckers readily, forming large colonies of genetically identical individuals.

Pawpaws are not self-fertile, and the patch will need a different pawpaw nearby to cross-pollinate. Its burgundy flowers appear in the early spring. No conclusive evidence exists regarding which insects pollinate the trees, but the shape of the flowers strongly indicates beetles. Flies also are suspected to be important pollinators. Speaking of insects, the pawpaw tree is the exclusive host plant for the zebra

swallowtail butterfly, our state butterfly, which is rare in some areas. There are no serious diseases or pests that affect pawpaws, and deer or other herbivores do not browse on their leaves.

The fruits are egg-shaped, 2-6 inches long and full of yellow-orange, custard-textured pulp as well as several large black seeds. The taste is usually described as somewhere between a banana and a mango. The grey-green fruits ripen sometime in September in Tennessee. They are eaten raw or processed into pulp by removing the skin and seeds. The pulp is made into jams, ice cream, added to baked goods or even used in beers, meads and spirits.

Those interested in growing pawpaws can plant individual trees in an orchard style (their suckers will need to be trimmed periodically), or they can establish a pawpaw patch. They grow in full to part sun, and prefer moist well-draining soils but can be enticed to grow in drier upland areas. Because of their strong taproots, trees cannot be transplanted from the wild, but starting from seed is fairly straightforward.

Seed-grown saplings are common in local nurseries. It's recommended to buy several from different sources—the more genetic diversity, the better. If the trees have a sufficient cross-pollinator, they will begin to bear fruit in 6-7 years. Buying grafted trees of a known cultivar is the only way to truly predict taste and size of fruit set.

The Pawpaw Research Program at Kentucky State University has made incredible strides in breeding and propagation and has released a selection of named cultivars. We recommend visiting their [website](#) for a wealth of other growing information.



Gardening Tips

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

Lou Erickson

March

March, spring begins (at least on the calendar) and cool season vegetables are being planted so here are some tips to consider:

- Climbing roses should not be pruned until after their first flush of growth. Now is a good time to tie the canes to a support before they flush out with spring growth.
- Evaluate your vegetable garden plans. Often a smaller garden with fewer weeds and insects will give you more produce.
- When night temperatures get above 40 degrees feed your pansies with a water-soluble fertilizer such as 20-20-20.
- Apply a pre-emergence herbicide to your lawn if you have had crabgrass and other summer weeds in the past. Timing is important and a good indicator when to apply is it just as forsythia begins to show some color.
- Sow nasturtiums this month. Soak seed overnight in water. Cover with $\frac{3}{4}$ inch soil.
- March is a good time to shop for and add lungwort (*Pulmonaria*) and Lenten rose (*Helleborus*) to your garden. Lungworts are early flowering shade perennials that often struggle in the heat and humidity of our Tennessee climate, so be aware that *Pulmonaria longifolia* and its cultivars and

hybrids are much more durable. Good selections are 'Roy Davidson,' 'E. B. Anderson,' 'Trevi Fountain' and my favorite for its vigor and heat tolerance, 'Diana Claire.'

- Consider joining the American Horticultural Society (<http://www.ahs.org>). AHS was founded in 1922 and is an educational, nonprofit, organization that recognizes and promotes excellence in American horticulture. With a membership you get the bimonthly magazine "The American Gardener," free or discounted admission to more than 240 public gardens and arboreta, and access to the AHS seed exchange program of which the UT Gardens, Jackson, is a contributor. If you visit several botanical gardens a year, membership will pay for itself and then some.

March is an ideal time to cut back the following garden plants:

- *Miscanthus* (maiden grass), *Pennisetum* (fountain grass), *Muhlenbergia* (muhly grass) and *Nassella* (Mexican feather grass) to 3 inches to 6 inches above the ground.
- *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle' flowers on new wood. To encourage stronger stem and tidy appearance, cut stem anywhere from 3 to 12 inches from the ground. If you have several plants, try them at different heights to determine what works best for you.
- *Liriope* (Monkey grass) before new growth appears. Use a string trimmer for larger areas.
- Hardy fern (particularly evergreen forms) before new growth appears.
- *Epimedium* (barrenwort) flowers early so don't delay.
- *Acorus* (sweet flag) and *Carex* only if the winter has browned the foliage.
- Prune out older branches on *Cornus sericea* and *Cornus sanguinea* (red twig dogwood) to encourage new growth with bright colored bark.
- Knock Out roses or other shrub roses that have gotten bigger than you desire. In mid-to-late March cut well established plants back 2 to 3 feet shorter than the height you desire them to reach.
- Summer-flowering *Spirea japonica* is best cut back before the new growth appears and you won't even know it come spring. A few common cultivars are 'Gold Mound,' 'Magic Carpet' and 'Gold Flame.'
- Older branches on *Callicarpa* (beautyberry) to encourage new growth that produces more berries.
- Rejuvenate overgrown *Nandina* by cutting back to a few inches on the outside, leaving taller canes in the center, staggering the heights.
- Limb-up and remove cross branches on trees and tree-type crapemyrtles as needed.
- Never top trees or crapemyrtles.
- Look closely at grafted plants and remove all growth below the graft, paying close attention to commonly grafted plants like witchhazels, contorted filberts, weeping cherries, weeping mulberries, dogwoods, fruit trees, crabapples, grafted rose, and Japanese maples.
- Early March is the best time to carry out drastic pruning on overgrown hollies.

New Year, New Schedule for UTIA Field Days

Public Is Invited to 2025 Events at UT AgResearch and Education Centers



Director of the UT Beef & Forage Center Bruno Pedreira delivers a presentation at the 2024 Steak and Potatoes Field Day at the Plateau AgResearch and Education Center in Crossville, Tennessee.

Photo by H. Harbin, courtesy UTIA.

UT Institute of Agriculture will present nearly two dozen field days in 2025 featuring advanced research and tried-and-true landscaping, production and land management techniques for practicing farmers, homeowners and all who are interested. Most events will be hosted at UT AgResearch and Education Centers throughout the state, and they will feature UTIA researchers and UT Extension specialists as expert speakers.

Field days begin in February with horse management events in East, Middle and West Tennessee. This year's schedule features the return of the West Tennessee Summer Celebration in Jackson on July 10 as well as new events

focused on soybeans, hops and more. The popular Beef Heifer Development School will be presented in the spring rather than later in the year.

The UT AgResearch system, a unit within the UT Institute of Agriculture, supports the land-grant mission and includes 10 UT AgResearch and Education Centers that manage more than 34,000 acres across Tennessee. Faculty and students conduct more than 1,000 field trials each year, and thousands of farmers, ranchers, researchers and members of the public attend the events to learn more about agricultural production and landscape and natural resource management. Topics range from livestock management to precision farming research and techniques, commercial horticulture, home gardening and more.

Mark your calendars and plan to attend! The 2025 schedule and locations include (all times local):

- Horse Management – February 10, 5 p.m. CST, First Farmer's Co-Op, Lexington, Tennessee
- Horse Management – February 11, 5 p.m. CST, Middle Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center at Spring Hill
- Tennessee Turf Tuesdays – April 1, 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. EDT. Event is online on Tuesdays during lunch with seven topics scheduled over several months.
Visit tiny.utk.edu/TurfTuesday for more information.
- Beef Heifer Development School – May 22, 8 a.m. CDT, Middle Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center at Lewisburg
- **Fruits of the Backyard – June 10, 8 a.m. CDT, Middle Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center at Spring Hill**
- Green Industry Day – June 12, 8 a.m. EDT, UT Gardens and Brehm Animal Science Arena at Knoxville

- Weed Tour – June 18, 8:30 a.m. CDT, West Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center at Jackson
- Tobacco Beef & More – June 26, 8 a.m. CDT, Highland Rim AgResearch and Education Center at Springfield
- **Summer Celebration – July 10, 8 a.m. CDT, West Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center, at Jackson**
- **Steak and Potatoes – August 21, 8 a.m. CDT, Plateau AgResearch and Education Center at Crossville**
- **Fall Gardeners' Festival – August 26, 8 a.m. CDT, Plateau AgResearch and Education Center at Crossville**
- **UT Arboretum Butterfly Festival – September 6, 9:30 a.m., Forest Resources AgResearch and Education Center – UT Arboretum Auditorium at Oak Ridge**
- Soybean Insect and Disease Field Day – September 9, time TBA, AgResearch and Education Center at Milan
- Cotton Tour – September 10, 8 a.m. CDT, West Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center at Jackson
- Hort, Hops, and Crops Field Day – September 18, 8 a.m. EDT, East Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center – Plant Sciences/Organic Crops Units at Knoxville
- Precision Livestock Technologies: Beef & Forage Systems – September 23 and 24, 8 a.m. CDT, Middle Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center at Spring Hill
- **Fall in the Gardens (Plant Sale and Garden Talks) – October 2 and 3, 9 a.m. CDT, West Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center at Jackson**
- **Woods and Wildlife Field Day – October 23, 8 a.m. CDT, Forest Resources AgResearch and Education Center – UT Highland Rim Forest at Tullahoma**
- Northeast Tennessee Youth Career Day – October, date and time TBA, Northeast Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center at Greeneville
- Northeast Tennessee Beef Expo – October, date and time TBA, Northeast Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center at Greeneville

For more information, visit agresearch.tennessee.edu/field-days.