

Sequatchie Valley Master Gardeners

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

January 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.

2025 Tentative Dates

- Feb 1, 2025, MG Meeting – Pikeville
- March 15, 2025, Soil Test Saturday and Tennessee Tree Day - Dunlap
- *April 26, 2025 MG Meeting – Dunlap
- May 3-4, 2025 Valley Fest – official dates not announced yet
- *July Tomato Tasting – Pikeville
- November 1, 2025 MG Meeting – Dunlap
- *Tentative dates to be discussed at the February Meeting

2025 Programs

Watch for emails with dates, times, and locations

- January 28, 2025, Tree Fruits, 6:00 PM CST Sequatchie County Fair Building
Apples, and Peaches will be the main focus but we will talk about other tree fruits.
register at <https://forms.office.com/r/LQuLLnc3yN>
- 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

January

Test the Tetsukabuto Winter Squash Variety in Your Garden

Submitted by Holly Jones, horticulturist, and kitchen garden manager, UT Gardens, Knoxville



The vigorous vines of the Tetsukabuto winter squash grow on a trellis and easily hold the round fruit. Airflow keeps the skin from rotting in the hot and humid summer. Photo courtesy UTIA.

Thanks to the work of agricultural researchers at Oregon State University, a fabulous winter squash variety has been reintroduced for both home gardeners and large-scale producers. In a multi-year comparison trial, researchers grew fifteen different varieties of winter squash, hoping to find one that would perform well despite the intense fungal disease pressure that local farmers were experiencing. One clear winner emerged. An interspecies Japanese hybrid called Tetsukabuto (*Cucurbita maxima x moschata*), or Tetsu for short, not only fruited almost twice as much as other plants in the trial but also stored remarkably well, scored high in taste tests and showed very good resistance to

squash vine borer, powdery mildew, and other common fungal pathogens.

Prior to this study, Tetsu seeds were hard to find in the United States, but now they are available from many retail sources. A quick look at the reviews will tell you that growers are finding similar success in various growing zones throughout the country. For successful pollination, aka fruit production, you need to plant either a kabocha (*Cucurbita maxima*) type or a butternut (*Cucurbita moschata*) type nearby. If your space is limited, look for dwarf or bush type varieties for your pollen source.

We have grown these twice at the UT Gardens, Knoxville, and 2024 was not as successful as the previous year. We tried them for the first time on a trellis system, and we were very impressed. The vigorous, attractive green vines quickly covered our cattle panel arch, and the medium-sized, round fruit was easily held by strong sturdy stems.

This year we tried growing them in a field directly on the ground, and many of the fruit were ruined by rotten spots on the underside. Lesson learned: either grow this squash vertically, or provide each one with its own little perch, like a terracotta pot or something similar, to increase airflow and keep the skin from rotting in our hot humid summers. They will be featured with purple flowering Hyacinth bean vines on an archway in the kitchen garden for the 2025 growing season.

The Japanese word Tetsukabuto translates as iron helmet, and the skin is quite hard. But they can easily be peeled raw with a good sharp chef's knife and a committed chef. You also can roast them in the oven whole with a few punctures to let the steam escape, then scoop out the rich, delicious flesh to be used for savory soups, sweet pie filling, or whipped with butter and salt for a side dish.



Gardening Tips

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

Lou Erickson

February

Trees and shrubs

- Cut a few stems of forsythia, flowering quince, pussy willow, or fruit trees for forcing inside.
- Transplant still-dormant deciduous shrubs and trees, plant fruit trees, and groundcovers.
- Prune summer-flowering woody ornamentals like butterfly bush, hibiscus, hydrangea (*H. tardiva* and 'Annebelle'), and rose of Sharon.
- Prune deciduous vines like honeysuckle, trumpet creeper, and porcelain berry.
- Remove invasive vines like Japanese honeysuckle, wisteria, and Oriental bittersweet from the landscape.
- Plant new roses, or move old roses after the 15th.

Perennials, Annuals and Bulbs

- Plan the summer garden.
- Add mulch to perennial beds before plants emerge to maintain a 3-4 inch layer (avoid newly-seeded areas).
- Plant cold-weather annuals; pansies, violas, snapdragons, English daisies, sweet William, gazanias, larkspur, and calendulas.
- Start seeds indoors of perennial herbs and slow-growing, annual flowers like ageratum, verbena, and vinca.

Fruit, Vegetables and Herbs

- Remove last year's canes from raspberries and blackberries (except everbearers); continue pruning grapevines and fruit trees.
- Prepare the vegetable garden by adding well-rotted manure, processed manure, peat moss, or compost and till in (weather permitting).
- Start cold-weather vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage) in cold frames.
- Direct-seed greens (kale, mustard, spinach), lettuce, peas, radishes, and onion sets in the garden.
- Plant, rhubarb, horseradish and asparagus.

Miscellaneous

- Turn the compost pile.
- Feed the birds.
- Keep the birdbath free of ice and change water weekly.
- Look for blooming hellebores, witch hazel, daphne, early daffodils, and Japanese Apricot (*Prunus mume*).
- Bluebirds are already looking for a place to nest, so clean out your birdhouse soon.