

Sequatchie Valley Master Gardeners

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

July 2025

Gardening News and Notes

2025 Dates

- July 26, 2025, Tomato Tasting – Pikeville
- August 5-9, 2025, Bledsoe County Fair
- August 14-16, 2025, Sequatchie County Fair
- November 1, 2025, MG Meeting – Dunlap

2025 Field Day and Events

- Summer Celebration – July 10, 8 a.m. CDT, West Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center, Jackson, TN
- 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, see the attached flyer at the end of the newsletter.

What is it?

answer on the last page



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

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UT Gardens Plant of the Month

Seed Grown Sunflowers: The Gift That Keeps on Giving

UT Gardens' July Plant of the Month

Submitted by Camille Newsom, research coordinator at UT Gardens, Jackson



Sunflowers attract pollinators and provide feed for birds. Collect the seeds and keep sunflowers growing in your garden or field for years to come. Photo by Camille Newsom, courtesy UTIA.

'Mammoth'. Some sunflowers branch, producing many flowers on each plant and others put their energy into producing one single large flower.

Not only are sunflowers a favorite of many people but they are also popular with wildlife. Watch one for a few minutes, and you will see bees, butterflies and other insects that drink nectar and gather pollen. After pollination, the petals dry up, the flowerheads hang down and seeds mature. If left intact, these will attract birds like goldfinch, titmice and chickadees to the garden. Collect some of the seeds, and you can keep growing them for years to come. To ensure ample pollen and fertile seed production, be sure to choose "open pollinated" varieties. Many hybridized introductions are pollenless and sterile to accommodate the cut flower industry.

In Tennessee, sunflowers can be grown from May through October as long as it is frost free. Seeds can be directly sown in the ground or started in containers and carefully transplanted once their true leaves emerge. When starting seeds in the ground, it's a good idea to plant the seeds 1-2 inches deep in loose soil and cover the planting area with something that will keep the birds and squirrels from digging them up. Sunflowers grow best in full sun and thrive in poor to average garden soil. They are drought tolerant once established but perform their best with regular watering. Planting in succession, about every two weeks, will give you continuous blooms. Taller varieties may benefit from staking if planted in areas exposed to a lot of wind, but most are strong enough to stand on their own. Seed grown sunflowers are great for beginners and experienced gardeners alike. You can find them growing at UT Gardens in Jackson and in the Knoxville kitchen garden and trial beds, typically in bloom July-August.

What is your favorite flower? One common answer is the sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*). Although they are popular for commercial bouquets, some might not realize how easy they are to grow from seed.

Sunflowers are native to much of North America. They are an important agriculture crop with more than 1 million acres grown in the United States each year, primarily for oil and bird seed. The seeds are inexpensive and easy to find at garden centers and in seed catalogues. Plant breeders have developed varieties in a wide range of colors, patterns and sizes. They can be white, green, pink, yellow, orange, red, bronze or brown with heights ranging from a mere 20 inches tall up to 20 feet or more. A few favorites include 'Autumn Beauty', 'Concert Bell', 'Earth Walker' and



Gardening Tips

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

Lou Erickson

August

August Garden tips and recommendations to fill your lazy summer days and keep your garden and landscape in top condition:

- Control crabgrass and other weeds that have invaded your lawn and garden. Weeds will be an even bigger problem next year if you let them go to seed. If you want to use chemical control, be sure to select the appropriate herbicide for the location and follow label instructions.
- August is a great time to plant perennials in pots to add late-season color to your garden.
- Remember to keep tall flowers staked.
- Be sure to keep garden mums well fertilized until buds show color.
- Check water needs daily. During the hot days of August, hanging baskets and containers tend to dry out daily.
- The fallen leaves below your roses and peonies need to be cleaned out to avoid diseases and insect invasion during the winter months.
- Pick summer vegetables every day or two to keep the plants producing.
- Take plenty of photos of your garden so next year you can refer back to them to see which plants you liked or disliked.
- Hummingbirds migrate in August, so keep feeders full. Also, change the water in bird baths regularly. Standing water is less healthy for the birds, and it may become a breeding ground for mosquito larvae.
- Fertilize azaleas, pieris, mountain laurel, and other ericaceous (acid-loving) species before the end of August. Use an acid-based soluble fertilizer containing iron. Also, fertilize roses to encourage new growth and hardening off before frost.
- Fertilize tall fescue and Bermuda lawns in late August using a high-nitrogen fertilizer of a 5:1:1 ratio. If the lawn needs extensive renovation and aeration, however, wait until early September.
- Early September is the month to start fertilizing fescue and other cool-season lawns. If you have not taken a soil test recently, now might just be the time to do so.
- Spray the underside of leaves with an appropriate insecticide, insecticidal soap, or summer oil to control sap-feeding lacebugs.
- Dig potatoes after the tops have died down.
- Sow seeds for late crops of beets, bush beans, cabbage, carrots, collards, kale, lettuce, peas, spinach, turnips, kohlrabi, and onions until August 15th. Transplants can still be planted of broccoli, early cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, and onions as well.
- As Japanese beetles return to the soil late in the month, treat for grubs with milky spore disease or beneficial nematodes. This will reduce winter mole destruction on your lawn.
- Mow the lawn on a high setting if the weather is dry.
- Keep everything well-watered.
- Stay cool and hydrated.

Fire Ants in Your Yard? UT Extension Offers Control Recommendations

Painful Pest Can Be Eliminated Using the Two-Step Method



Fire ant mounds can recover quickly after being mowed or disturbed, experts instead recommend insecticides for long-term management. Photo by T. Cronin, courtesy UTIA.

up to 90% when used according to label directions.

“Fire ant bait has low rates of insecticide and no residual activity. If you have children or pets, you can use this method in your yard and still enjoy being outdoors. However, if colonies are still present after seven to 10 days, proceed to the second step,” says Brown.

For step two, remaining colonies should be treated individually by sprinkling bait one to three feet around the mound. Both broadcast applications and individual treatments should be conducted while ants are foraging, or actively leaving the mound in search of food. To determine if ants are foraging, place one to two tablespoons of bait or a small amount of canned tuna, hot dog, an oily potato chip or other greasy foods nearby. If these samples attract fire ants within 30 minutes, it is an ideal time to apply.

“Foraging activity slows when temperatures drop below 65 degrees Fahrenheit or rise above 90,” says Karen Vail, professor and Extension urban entomologist. “In the summer, late afternoon or early evening is the ideal time to treat mounds. Do not mix bait with other materials or use outdated insecticides, anything older than two years or not stored in an airtight container must be replaced. Once opened, stored bait can become distasteful to ants over time, so only purchase the quantity needed for the current application. It is also important to apply when grass is dry and rain is not expected, ensuring the ants can easily bring bait back to the nest.”

Flammable substances like gasoline are not recommended for fire ant control, as they pose safety risks to the user and can contaminate the soil. Home remedies, such as large quantities of boiling water, can eliminate mounds approximately 60% of the time, particularly on cool, sunny mornings when ants are near the surface. However, in addition to potentially harming the applicator and surrounding lawn, boiling water often does not kill the queen and instead causes the colony to relocate.

“In addition to baits, other individual treatment options for step two include drenches, which are diluted liquid concentrates poured on top; dusts, which are powdery insecticides sprinkled across the mound; and injectable products, which are inserted directly inside. Regardless of the product you choose, always follow the label instructions and apply only the recommended amount,” says Brown. “The colony should die off anywhere from days to weeks later depending on the product selected.”

For more information on fire ant control, please visit fireants.tennessee.edu or contact your [local county Extension office](#).

Annual Steak and Potatoes Field Day Scheduled for August 21

Cattle and Vegetable Producers

Invited to Learn Research Advances



The annual Steak and Potatoes Field Day presented by the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture will include topics of interest to beef cattle producers and fruit and vegetable producers. Throughout the morning, experts from both UT AgResearch and UT Extension will share their knowledge to help producers enhance their operations.

This field day is scheduled for Thursday, August 21, 2025, at the Plateau AgResearch and Education Center. Topics to be discussed include cow efficiency, bull management, high density planting of fruit trees,

and fruit and vegetable disease diagnostics. There will also be a presentation about the cost of establishing forages as well as a food safety demonstration.

On-site registration begins at 8 a.m. CDT with presentations beginning at 8:30 and concluding at 11:30. A sponsored lunch will be available following the seminars. This event is open to the public and is free to attend. Pre-registration is encouraged but not required by visiting this link online: tiny.utk.edu/SP2025.

The Plateau AgResearch Center will also host the Fall Gardeners' Festival five days later, on August 26, at the same location. That event, which is conducted in cooperation with the Cumberland County Master Gardeners, a program managed by UT Extension, will be of interest to landowners and gardeners of all types. Featured at that event will be a variety of presentations, educational workshops, exhibits, wagon tours, garden vendors and more. Detailed information is available on the Cumberland County Master Gardeners website: ccmga.org.

The Plateau AgResearch and Education Center is located off Highway 70N at 320 Experiment Station Road in Crossville. A map to the facility and complete directions are available online at plateau.tennessee.edu.

The University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture is comprised of the Herbert College of Agriculture, UT College of Veterinary Medicine, UT AgResearch, and UT Extension. Through its land-grant mission of teaching, research and outreach, the Institute touches lives and provides Real. Life. Solutions. to Tennesseans and beyond. utia.tennessee.edu.

What is it? Answered.

Sunscald on peppers is a condition where the fruit is damaged by excessive sunlight and heat, resulting in bleached or discolored, sometimes leathery, spots on the exposed areas. It's not a disease but a physiological disorder caused by overexposure to intense sunlight, especially during hot weather.

What causes sunscald?

- Sudden exposure to intense sunlight: When peppers are suddenly exposed to direct sunlight, especially after being shaded by foliage, the fruit tissue can be damaged, [according to SDSU Extension](#).
- High temperatures: Hot weather exacerbates the problem, as high temperatures can break down the pepper tissue and make it more susceptible to damage.
- Reduced foliage cover: Sunscald is more common on peppers with sparse foliage, where the fruit is not adequately shaded by leaves. This can be due to disease, pest damage, or excessive pruning.



Symptoms of sunscald:

- Whitish or discolored spots: Initially, sunscald appears as whitish or light-colored spots on the exposed side of the pepper.
- Sunken or wrinkled areas: The damaged tissue may become sunken or wrinkled.
- Creamy white or brown spots: Older fruit may develop creamy white spots, while younger fruit may show light brown spots.
- Leathery or dry tissue: In severe cases, the affected tissue can dry out and become leathery.
- Secondary infections: The damaged areas can be susceptible to secondary infections by fungi and bacteria, leading to further rot.



How to prevent sunscald:

- Maintain healthy foliage: Ensure plants have sufficient foliage to shade the fruit.
- Proper watering and fertilization: Maintain consistent soil moisture and provide adequate nutrients to support healthy growth.
- Use shade cloth: Provide shade during intense sunlight, especially in the afternoon.
- Consider plant spacing: Ensure proper spacing to allow for adequate foliage cover.
- Choose disease-resistant varieties: Select pepper varieties known for their vigorous foliage and disease resistance.

Can you still eat peppers with sunscald? Yes, peppers with sunscald are still generally safe to eat. The affected areas are typically just cosmetic damage. However, it's best to cut away the damaged portions and check for any signs of mold or rot before consuming the rest of the pepper.

<https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C1306&title=whats-wrong-with-my-pepper-common-defects-of-bell-peppers-explained>

Fall Gardeners' Festival

Tuesday, August 26, 2025

Registration begins at 8:00 a.m. CDT

Preregister at tiny.utk.edu/FGF2025

Presentations 9:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m. CDT

Free to the Public



Scan for Preregistration.
Note: Preregistration is not required.

UT Plateau AgResearch and Education Center

320 Experiment Station Road
Crossville, Tennessee



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Fall Gardeners' Festival

Tuesday, August 26, 2025

Visit the UT Plateau AgResearch and Education Center for a day planned just for the gardener. Enjoy educational workshops, exhibits, Ask-the-Expert, wagon tours of the entire facility, and garden vendors.

Food will be available for purchase.

Tent presentations include:

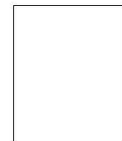
- Making the Most of Your Home Greenhouse
- Tennessee Vegetable Garden Trial Favorites
- Tips and Tricks for a Successful Fall Garden
- Raised Beds and Container Gardening
- Sustainable Landscape Design
- Invasive Plants of Tennessee
- Fruit for the Home Garden
- Understanding Soil Health
- How to Grow a Cutting Garden
- Living Screens for the Landscape
- Herbs: Creative Culinary Companions
- Home Turf Advantage: Winning at Lawn Care
- Pollinator and Plant Companions of Tennessee
- Duds and Studs: Woody Ornamental Plant Selection
- Friends in the Shade: Keeping Your Hosta Company
- Garden Defenders: Beneficial Insects in Your Landscape

plateau.tennessee.edu

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