

Sequatchie Valley Master Gardeners

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

November 2024

Gardening News and Notes

Reminder

As we near the end of the year, don't forget to record your hours. As of November 4, 398 Volunteer hours, valued at \$11,834, has been reported.

Volunteers are key to Extension program delivery, as a whole UT Extension has reported 1,054 volunteer hours in all program areas, valued at \$31,578.

Agriculture and Natural Resources Programs for 2024

Composting

November 19, 2024 – 6:00 PM Central,
Sequatchie County Fair Building, 103 Heard St, Dunlap
RSVP email sdbarker@utk.edu, call 949-2611 or
online @ <https://forms.gle/7UZonuFuXudKiykH8>
Free!

Winter Bird Feeding

December 17, 2024 — 6:00 PM Central,
Sequatchie County Fair Building, 103 Heard St, Dunlap
RSVP email sdbarker@utk.edu, call 949-2611 or
online @ <https://forms.gle/AnZHBBztgVtdrrpy5>
Free!

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.

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

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**The University of Tennessee is an
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UT Gardens Plant of the Month

November

Poison? No, Sumac Is the Antidote for Hot Parched Sites



Winged sumac has glossy leaves with a stiffer habitat than smooth and staghorn. All three sumacs, not to be confused with poison sumac or swamp sumac, thrive in hot, dry sites.

Sumac! Their eyes are wide that I would recommend it for any landscape! This reaction is not uncommon because of the black sheep in the family. Poison sumac is indeed a devil you don't want to encounter, but I can almost guarantee you that you won't. Poison sumac is rare in the wild and would require you to don some serious waders and seek the few locations it has been recorded in our swamps.

Spears of red berries are your sign. Poison sumac, also known as swamp sumac, has white berries and will never be seen in the places you find the drought-tolerant red-berried species of sumac that cheerfully thrive on our state's sunblasted unirrigated roadsides.

The red berried spears salute the female colonies of sumac, and their deliciously lemony tartness is relished by birds and recorded to be a primary source of winter food for our beloved Eastern bluebird, according to research by West Tennessee ornithologist David Pitts, a retired UT Martin professor. I frequently suck on the tart berries myself as I wander my property and was surprised when I noticed that some clumps of sumac had better flavor than others, just as you will frequently find that better blackberry patch in the wild. I've also experimented with using them in recipes found online, both sweet and savory.

At first, I had to pay close attention to tell apart the three most dominant species in this region. Eventually the differences become evident even at a distance, at least to differentiate winged sumac (*Rhus copallinum*) from smooth (*Rhus glabra*) and staghorn (*Rhus typhina*) sumacs. Staghorn and smooth look much alike until you get close enough to see or stroke the velvet (like a buck's emerging antlers "staghorns") as opposed to smooth's stems. Winged is also called shining sumac, so if you are not close enough to look for the winged midrib on the compound leaves, you will learn to notice its glossy leaf surfaces flashing their identity messages. It's also a more sprightly upright leaf with a stiffer habit that throw themselves against the sky, while smooth's matte textures and softly drooping leaves are more relaxed. These soft leaves have an underside very nearly white that sway and flutter more as you whoosh past in a vehicle, sometimes throwing themselves up to toss their "white petticoats."

Sumac is gaining acceptance in the landscape realms, especially the irresistible form 'Tiger Eyes.' Dissected forms have been around for decades, but 'Tiger Eyes' foliage was both dissected and the color of a ripe lemon. It's been reported to be a bit difficult to get established, but I suspect that's because most gardeners overestimate how much to water it. Remember, it's a sumac. They thrive in hot and dry sites, which may become the major criteria for selecting low maintenance plants if our summers become more torturous.



Gardening Tips

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

Lou Erickson

December

Deck your halls and walls with things found in your garden. Steal a little fresh-cut greenery from your landscape. When pruning, cut back to a branch so as not to leave a stub. When cutting conifers, don't go beyond the innermost needles. If you do, it may not regenerate from that point again. To extend the life of fresh-cut greenery, soak it in a bucket of water overnight to hydrate the leaves and stems before using.

If you think Christmas lights are the only way to brighten up your outdoor winter scene, you haven't met some of our favorite plants. You will get lots of excitement and winter interest from plants like possumhaw (*Ilex decidua*), winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillata*) and redbud dogwood. Arizona cypress and 'Grey Owl' Juniper are a beautiful blue while conifers like Chamaecyparis 'Crippsii,' 'Fernspray Gold,' and 'Vintage Gold' display gorgeous golden colors.

Growing rosemary indoors can be tricky. While it is one of the most drought-tolerant plants once established in the landscape, it resents drying out in a pot. Seldom will it recover once it has dried out. At the same time, it does not like wet soil. Check daily and keep the soil slightly moist. In the spring plant it in a sunny, well-drained location once the danger of frost has passed. Most of the topiary rosemary plantings available around the holidays are not reliably winter hardy outdoors in Tennessee. 'Arp' and 'Hill Hardy' are two of the hardier cultivars. 'Arp' has proven to be especially reliable.

Small hollies, conifers, twisted willow and redbud dogwoods make great additions to winter pots and can be added to the garden come spring.

Cyclamen, kalanchoe, poinsettia, paperwhites, amaryllis, Christmas cactus, English ivy and rosemary topiaries offer weeks of added color and interest to the home during the holidays. Most perform best in bright, indirect light away from drafts. Rosemary would appreciate as much light as possible. While some may be attractive for years to come, others such as cyclamen, kalanchoe, and poinsettias are often best added to the compost pile once they begin to decline. Keep your paperwhites from flopping over by adding alcohol.

The idea of a living Christmas tree that can be planted outdoors after the holidays often sounds appealing, but without proper selection and care, this can be a disappointing experience. First, you should carefully select a tree that is suited to your part of the state. While white pine, spruce and fir will work in the cooler parts of Tennessee, they should be avoided in the warmer parts. Virginia pine, eastern red cedar, Japanese cedar and Arizona cypress are good choice for all parts of Tennessee. Avoid hemlock and leyland cypress due to numerous problems with insects and disease once they are in the landscape. Any living tree brought indoors should not remain inside longer than five days. One option is to go ahead and put the lights on the tree and enjoy the lights outside before time to bring it indoors. Be sure to keep it well watered, but not standing in water.

If you haven't already winterized your irrigation system, do it right away to avoid broken pipes and costly repairs.

Winter is a good time to lime your soil if it is acidic. Your local UT Extension office can provide you with instructions on how to take the soil samples and send them to the UT Soil, Plant and Pest Center for analysis. The center staff will analyze your sample and send recommendations for how much lime

you need to apply to your lawn and garden. It takes months for lime to react with the soil, so by applying now, you will be helping your spring garden. Pelletized lime is the easiest, least messy form to apply.

Check out the sale racks at your local garden center for bulbs that have been reduced in price. If they feel firm and are not moldy, they should still be good. Plant them as soon as possible. There is still time for them to get the winter chilling they need.

Preparing for Winter, Your Home and You Make Fall the Time to Prepare for Cold Temps

Is your home ready for winter? Are you? According to Martha Keel, environmental health and housing specialist with University of Tennessee Extension, fall is the perfect time to get ready for winter. Good home maintenance is essential to protect your investment, prevent costly damage during the winter and keep your home safe and healthy.

While fall is all about the beautiful leaves, bonfires and heading outside to enjoy the crisp weather, it should also be about making sure you and your home are ready for winter. The checklist below will help you ensure home winter readiness.

Home Safety

- Check smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. More than 70 percent of the fatal structure fires in Tennessee occur where there is no working smoke alarm.
- Check chimneys and flues to make sure they are clean and operating properly

Home Maintenance

- Repair any broken or cracked glass in your windows so that heat does not escape in cold months
- Clean and tune furnaces, boilers and hot water heaters, checking for leaks or sweating
- Check your attic's insulation, ensuring it is in place
- consider installing appliance timers to cut your winter energy costs
- Clean gutters and downspouts
- Drain outdoor faucets and hoses

Car Safety

- Add a blanket or sleeping bag to your car's emergency kit, along with extra hats, socks and gloves
- Purchase a windshield scraper for frosty mornings, or keep it in the trunk if you own one already



The time to prepare your home for winter is before the snow arrives! Image courtesy of UTIA.