

Gardening With The Masters

Growing, Gardening and Gaining Knowledge

February/March 2023

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Editor's Corner

By Marcia Winchester,
Cherokee County Master Gardener

Overgrown shrubs—what do we do with them? My neighborhood is about 25 years old. This means that shrubs planted 20 to 25 years ago are at full maturity. A common habit of both homeowners and even professional landscapers is to plant shrubs in too small of a space. These shrubs will then need to be pruned to fit the space as they grow.

Some shrubs are maintained by lightly pruning each year, which will keep them at a consistent size. Some shrubs are ignored until they are overgrown and need major pruning to get them to both fit in the space and to look attractive. When a shrub that has been planted by a walkway gets overgrown, it can become a hazard to both humans and pets.

If you have overgrown shrubs in your landscape, you will need to evaluate the situation to decide what action to take. To do this, you should ask some questions. Does the shrub add to the landscape? Did you plant the shrub or did the previous owner? Do you even like the shrub? Should you do major pruning and wait months for the plant to recover, or should you simply remove it? Some shrubs never grow back correctly and should be removed. After removal, do you replace it with a smaller shrub that won't infringe on the walkway, or perhaps with sod or some pollinator plants?

If you like the shrub and decide to keep it and maintain it through pruning, first be sure you have it correctly identified. Then research when and how to prune that type of shrub. University of Georgia Extension has several publications on this topic to aid you: Bulletin #949 "Basic Principles of Pruning Woody Plants" and Bulletin #961 "Pruning Ornamentals Plants in the Landscape." These can be found at extension.uga.edu/publications.



Overgrown shrub courtesy Marcia Winchester

February is a great time to analyze your landscape with fresh eyes and make some improvements that you will enjoy for years.

IN THIS ISSUE

Marcia

Editor's CornerPage 1	Continued Articles/Did You Know?Page 6
Don't Spray That Bug!Page 2	Continued ArticlesPage 7
Freezing Weather How Bad on Plants?Page 3	February Gardening Tips/RainfallPage 8
The Great Backyard Bird CountPage 4	March Gardening TipsPage 9
Winter Scavenger Hunt/Nature Fun!.....Page 5	Recipes/LinksPage 10

Don't Spray that Bug!

By Carolyn Puckett, Cherokee County Master Gardener

I can recall a time when even a short summer trip in an auto would leave my windshield covered with the sticky remains of insects. Now, a day of running errands means hardly any fatal encounters with insects. Where have all the insects gone?

Some studies have shown that as many as 60 percent of insects have vanished. There are probably multiple factors contributing to the decline, but one is our overuse of systemic insecticides. Systemic pesticides enter all parts of a plant and can last as long as a year. Unfortunately, systemic insecticides kill not only the Japanese beetles munching on your plant's leaves, but also the butterflies and bees sipping nectar from the flowers. And when we lose these insects, not only is the beauty of nature diminished, but also the lives of birds and other critters that feed on insects.



Japanese beetle (*Popillia japonica*) Jim Baker, North Carolina State University, Bugwood.org

So, how do we reach a compromise where the insects will not devour our vegetable garden but we do not kill off vast numbers of insects? The answer is integrated pest management (IPM).



What is IPM? The goal of IPM is to manage a horticultural pest in the least harmful manner for non-target entities, such as humans, pets, wildlife, beneficial insects, and the environment. “Integrated” refers to the fact that all control measures (cultural, mechanical, biological, and chemical) are considered and used as appropriate. I like to think of it as a multistep process from the most benign methods to the most toxic. Pests are much less likely to survive a program that uses many different methods.

The first step is to identify the pest. It can sometimes be difficult to tell whether the damage is caused by environmental conditions or an insect, fungus, bacteria, or virus. There are a number of online tools to help with identifying the pest. Start by searching for problems specific to the plant species being attacked. Put “extension” or “edu” in your search term to get reputable information. You can also email the Cherokee County Master Gardeners at info@cherokeemastergardeners.com for help. Please include pictures of the damage or insect.



<https://www.ugaurbanag.com/soil-testing-georgia/>

The most benign way to prevent pest damage is to adopt good cultural practices. For vegetables, you can sometimes time planting and harvest dates to avoid pests. Other practices include checking your plants often to find problems before they get out of hand, clearing all plant debris once a plant has stopped producing, and disposing of infected debris rather than composting it. It includes crop rotation, meaning not planting the same family of vegetables in the same spot multiple years in a row. It also includes getting a soil test to make certain that your plants are getting the nutrients they need, but not too many nutrients. Insects just love the fresh new growth that results from overuse of nitrogen. Also, maintaining an appropriate pH for your plant will keep your plants from being stressed. Interplanting vegetables with flowering plants and separating the vegetables rather than planting all of the same species together can help minimize insect and disease damage.

When planting ornamentals, match the plant to the site. Avoid planting species that dislike wet conditions in an area that stays wet, or a shade-loving plant in full sun. Buy plants that are healthy and have good root systems. Select species and cultivars that are resistant to insects and diseases. Avoid a “monoculture” where you use a sizable number of the same plant in an area. Use an organic mulch to conserve soil moisture. Maintain good sanitation—removing dead leaves from under a diseased plant will lessen the likelihood of a pest repeat the following year.

How do you deal with the insects that you find on your plant? First, learn to live with a little insect damage. We like our plants to look pristine, but a few holes in your leaves will not negatively impact your crop or ornamentals. If we restrain from using systemic insecticides that kill the beneficial insects as well as the bad guys, Mother Nature often takes care of the problem by sending in the good insects that eat the bad ones, keeping the damage to an acceptable level.

Of course, you can assist Mother Nature by hand picking the bad insects off the plants and squashing them or dropping them into a bowl of soapy water. With weak insects, such as aphids and spider mites, you can simply knock the pests off with a strong stream of water.



Freezing Weather - How Bad on Plants?

By Marc Teffeau, Cherokee County Master Gardener

A question that I am sure is on many Cherokee County gardeners' minds is how much damage my plants received from the record-breaking low temperatures we experienced in late December of 2022. So, did those temperatures kill the plants or just set them back? The answer is "it depends."

According to the Georgia Master Gardener Handbook, "freezing injury is a complex phenomenon governed by a number of factors, including genetics, the minimum temperature level, the speed at which the temperature dropped, the duration of the below-freezing temperatures, the degree of the hardiness of the plant at the time of the freeze, and the nature of the freeze (i.e., whether the freeze is accompanied by wind or occurs suddenly following several days or weeks of warm weather)."

Another factor that impacts freezing damage is the plant's location in the landscape or its "microclimate." For example, plants on the north and northeast sides of a house may suffer more damage than those on the south and west side. Conversely, plants protected from wind exposure by walls or fences will be less likely to have damage.

UGA Extension Publication Circular 872 "Winter Protection of Ornamental Plants" indicates that "cold injury can occur on all parts of the plant including fruit, stems, leaves, trunk and roots.

Typically, homeowners notice the cold damage first on the leaves and stems. Ice forms within the plant's cells, the plant tissue dies, and leaves or stems become brownish-black and mushy. Cold acclimated plants can often withstand this type of ice formation. Plants that are not acclimated may sustain injury to the root system and may be severely damaged or killed. Sometimes this is not noticed until the plant fails to leaf out the following spring.

"Windy conditions and accompanying cold also may cause plant damage through desiccation (evaporative water loss exceeds water absorption). This is the drying out of the plant. Marginal leaf scorching or leaf-tip burn is characteristic of this problem. Leaves may eventually turn completely brown and defoliate.

"Damage to flower and leaf buds can occur during periods of low or fluctuating temperatures. This can lead to a reduction or total loss of blooms and damage of the foliage the following spring. Damage can be appraised by removing several buds and cutting them open to reveal their condition. If they appear green throughout, they are healthy; if they are partially brown or darkened, they have been injured.

"Cold damage may not be apparent in the plant for several days or weeks. To determine if your plants have been damaged by the cold, wait several days after a freeze and remove several buds, stems and leaves (if present) from the plant. Use a sharp knife or razor blade to cut a cross section of the bud's top. If there is any discoloration in the bud, they have been damaged.

"To determine if stems have been injured by the cold, peel the bark back to reveal the cambium layer (layer directly under the bark). If there is any black or brown discoloration, damage has occurred. Leaf damage may appear as obvious black or burnt foliage, usually occurring at the tip of the branches. Damage on buds, stems and leaves may be localized and the entire plant may not be affected.

"Waiting to prune after freezes have passed will guard against removing living wood. If localized damage has occurred to the foliage or stems, prune several inches below the injured tissue. Although injured buds may reduce or eliminate flowering or leaf emergence in the spring, no pruning is necessary."



Damaged tea olive (*Osmanthus fragrans*) on west side of house
courtesy Jennifer Ruscilli



Damaged camellia buds Jennifer Ruscilli

The Great Backyard Bird Count: February 17-20, 2023

By Mary Tucker, Cherokee County Master Gardener

For four days in February, you can be an important “citizen scientist” by helping researchers gather information about birds. These four days, February 17 through 20, are when the Great Backyard Bird Count takes place. This is a world-wide event that helps scientists evaluate the abundance and distribution of birds. This event also helps track bird population changes and trends that occur over the years.

The Great Backyard Bird Count was launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. The four-day count now involves more than 375,000 people of all ages across the globe. In 2022, over 7000 species of birds were observed around the world, with 682 species in just the United States.

You don’t have to be an expert birder to take part in the count, and if you can’t identify every bird you see or hear, that’s OK too. Just log in the ones you know.

It’s easy and fun to take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, and I’ve personally been participating for over 15 years. Bird counts can be done anywhere, though I usually do mine at home by watching birds at my feeders. Other participants prefer to go to a park or nature trail or a favorite birding site, such as a lake shore.

All you have to do is watch birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count. Keep a separate record for the different times or places that you participate. Count the highest number of each bird species observed at one time (to ensure the birds are not counted more than once), and keep track of the amount of time spent counting. Then log on to the GBBC website (<http://gbbc.birdcount.org/>) to enter your data.

Results are updated in real time in the form of animated maps and colorful graphs, so you can see what’s happening with birds around the world during the count. Of course, it’s especially fun to see what species other birdwatchers in Georgia are observing.

Visit the GBBC website for more information about the event and how to participate. You’ll see that there are three ways to enter data: the Merlin Bird ID App, the eBird Mobile App, or on a computer. You will find full instructions in addition to bird lists tailored to your Zip Code to help you record your bird sightings.

There are other similar events that occur throughout the year, including the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s Project FeederWatch and NestWatch. Any time of year, you can report bird sightings via eBird, an online database of bird observations that is a joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society.

The Cornell Lab also has a wealth of resources that give average folks like you and me an opportunity to learn more about birds in general. Their website “All About Birds” offers information about bird identification and has detailed facts about various bird species. At Cornell Lab’s “Bird Academy” you can find videos, lectures, online learning games, and numerous online courses about birds.

Websites:

Great Backyard Bird Count: <https://gbbc.birdcount.org>

Cornell Lab of Ornithology: <https://www.birds.cornell.edu>

All About Birds: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org>

Cornell Lab Bird Academy: <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org>

National Audubon Society: <https://www.audubon.org>

eBird: <https://ebird.org>



<https://www.birdcount.org/social-media/>



A Winter Scavenger Hunt; Then Fun With Nature

By Jennifer Ruscilli, Cherokee County Master Gardener

You may not think of winter being a key gardening season: no pollinators, shrubs may not be blooming, and most trees are bare. What's there to look at you say? Well, winter can surprise you. Even though we have had the mother of all freezing temperatures, most in a generation, there are surprises you can find during winter in the garden. You just need to spot them. Why not get outside with the kids, young and old, and go on a "Winter Nature Scavenger Hunt"?

This is a fun activity for any age, and while being outside on a warmer winter day, you can find more than you think. You can start with a list, simple at first, like find an acorn, or different shape or color leaves, depending on your shrubs. Can you find any berry-producing shrubs, shrubs with needle-like leaves, or shrubs with blooms? Once you start looking, your eye will notice things you didn't expect to see or feel in winter.

Once you find and collect all the treasures interesting to you, lay them out on some paper. Think of this like a garden journal where you can record details of your winter scavenger hunt, the names of your findings, interesting things about this stick, or the color or feel of a leaf. It's a good place to start learning names even if you don't know all of them.



Collected items courtesy Jennifer Ruscilli



Clay heart ornaments, and trinket bowls with impressions in the clay courtesy Jennifer Ruscilli

Then the fun begins. What to do with all your collections? Trinket bowls are fun to make, and since February is close by, heart ornaments. We used air-dry clay and tried pressing our fern fronds and leaves into the clay. Once dry, a thin, watery coat of paint will highlight the impressions, or you can leave it without color. You can also use Mod-Podge for a sealer. This is good if you have left some leaves in the clay or after you have painted it.

A second way to use your findings is with nature suncatchers. We used heavy paper for the frames (you can use cardboard) and sticky contact paper – clear or translucent. We used translucent contact paper so the sun would shine through. Then choose any material you want to place on the contact paper. Some material is better used “flatter” than others, so you may need to “press” them. Two quick methods to “press” flowers/leaves using a microwave are listed below along with instructions to create your suncatchers. It all depends on the artist! And if you paint your frames, be sure to wear an apron.

Things to remember about your winter nature scavenger hunt.

- Make a list if you like. Start simple and let it grow; for example, find acorns, sticks with lichen, fern fronds, etc.
- If you have winter-blooming shrubs, you may find flowers or buds (such as on camellia or edgeworthia).
- If you have hollies or cherry laurels you may find berries that the birds prefer in winter.
- You may find different kinds of acorns depending on your oaks (white or red).
- You may find dried blooms from last year's shrubs (for example, hydrangea).
- You may find fronds from native ferns.
- Sticks can be tied together with twine to make other creative things like fairy garden doors.
- If you have extra cardboard and contact paper, you can make a bookmark, and don't forget the tassel.



Suncatcher using anise and autumn fern leaves courtesy Jennifer Ruscilli

As people say in Georgia, “If you don't like the weather, wait a few days. The weather will be different,” and our warmer winter days are a good reason to go on a winter nature scavenger hunt that involves everyone.

Quick methods for “pressing flowers/leaves” using a microwave:

[Microwave Pressed Flowers Recipe - Food.com](#)

[How To Press Flowers in The Microwave - Studio DIY](#)

Continued on page 7

Don't Spray that Bug!continued from page 2

Consider whether pest control is even needed. For example, leaf spots on a mature tree late in the growing season rarely require action as the damage will not harm the tree.

If the insects are causing more damage than is acceptable, you can use an insecticide, but please start with the most benign, such as insecticidal soap or horticultural oil. These are contact insecticides; they only kill insects that you directly spray them on. Monitor your plants regularly and repeat the use of insecticidal soap or horticultural oil if the beneficial insects are not controlling the pest.

There are also biological pesticides—predators, parasites, and pathogens in nature that attack pests. *Bacillus thuringiensis* (BT) is effective against caterpillars and beetles. You can also buy beneficial insects, such as ladybug beetles and praying mantises. However, the quality of purchased insects cannot be guaranteed, and yes, those ladybugs will fly away. Nurturing your existing beneficial insects, such as by providing blooms all season long, is a better practice.

Hopefully, the above steps will control the insect pests. If not, then you might wish to consider using more toxic insecticides. If you wish to maintain “organic” measures, there are a number of insecticides that are approved for organic use, such as spinosad, neem oil, and pyrethrum. Even organic pesticides must be used with discretion. Nature is a complex ecosystem, and you can inadvertently make matters worse by the indiscriminate use of chemicals.

I have been talking about controlling pest insects, but your pest may be a fungus rather than insects. To prevent fungi, provide good air circulation. Also, plant disease-resistant cultivars. Again, monitor frequently. Fungicides do not kill existing fungi; they only make conditions unfavorable for fungal spores to germinate, so you must apply the fungicides before a problem has developed. To keep the fungal infection from worsening, repeat application of the fungicide as stated on the product's label.

And then there are the weeds that can get out of hand. An organic mulch will prevent light from reaching weed seeds, preventing many seeds from germinating and shading out emerging weeds. Landscape fabric can become a problem, as weed roots can penetrate the fabric, so I do not recommend it. Using cover crops, also known as green manures, can help control weeds. Tilling can damage soil structure and actually create more weeds, particularly perennial weeds. If you must till, do so in the fall to expose the weeds and insects it uncovers to winter cold.

Once you have implemented your IPM strategy, you should continue to monitor the plants to determine if your plan is working or if additional measures are needed. Common reasons for failure are misidentifying the pest, using the wrong pest control measure, or applying the pesticide at an inappropriate time in the pest's lifecycle.

For more detailed information on IPM, see

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook/8-integrated-pest-management-ipm>.



By Mary Tucker, Master Gardener



Carolina mantis (*Stagmomantis carolina*)
Sturgis McKeever, Georgia Southern University, Bugwood.org

If you want to practice IPM (Integrated Pest Management), it's helpful to be able to identify insects, either harmful or beneficial. The University of Georgia has several useful resources:

- Insect Identification for Southeastern Landscapes (Bulletin 1409) can be found under the Publications tab at the UGA Extension website: <https://extension.uga.edu>
- UGA's Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health (www.bugwood.org) has a wealth of insect images on its website as well as numerous publications regarding insects, the damage they cause, and how to control insect pests.



Chinese mantis (*Tenodera aridifolia sinensis*) Gerald Holmes, Strawberry Center, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Bugwood.org

These photos from Bugwood.org illustrate the difference between two praying mantis species, the native Carolina mantis (*Stagmomantis carolina*) and the non-native (often considered invasive) Chinese mantis (*Tenodera aridifolia sinensis*). The native mantis is smaller and its wings do not fully cover the body. In contrast, the wings of the larger Chinese mantis fully cover the body and may even extend beyond it.



Freezing Weather - How Bad on Plants?..... continued from page 3



Cold damaged loropetalums courtesy Marcia Winchester

Fortunately, ornamental trees and shrubs can leaf out again if the initial growth is damaged or destroyed. Damaged trees and shrubs have only suffered a temporary setback. If your shrubs and trees are healthy and well-established in the landscape, they will produce additional growth to replace the damaged foliage within a few weeks. However, this “re-flushing” will put some stress on the plant’s reserves. As a result, it is important to give the freeze-damaged woody ornamentals some extra attention during the growing season. This attention includes watering during dry periods and perhaps some additional fertilization to aid in the plant’s recovery.

Georgia can experience freeze damage both in winter and in spring, after new foliage has begun to emerge. This tender foliage may be subject to freezing damage for perennials in the landscape. The foliage may turn brown or be twisted in shape and off-color. If the freeze is short in duration, the roots and crowns of the perennial plants, especially mulched plants, should not suffer any damage.

Perennial plants will respond to the freezing damage by sending out new foliage to replace the damaged leaves. However, on fruit crops, depending upon the cultivar and how far the fruit blossoms may have opened, we may see reduced blueberry and fruit tree crops, especially on early flowering cultivars.

For more information, see these two UGA Extension Publications: Circular 872 “Winter Protection of Ornamental Plants” and Bulletin 1467 “Effects of Low Temperature on Plants.” These can be found in the “Publications” tab on the UGA Extension website: <https://extension.uga.edu/>.

A Winter Scavenger Hunt; Then Fun With Nature...continued from page 5

Winter Nature Suncatchers

Materials Needed:

- One or two frames, circle or rectangle shaped. We used one.
- Two circle or rectangle shapes of clear or translucent contact paper a little larger than the inside missing area. Your material will sandwich in between these.

Instructions:

- Cut out frames and contact paper shapes. You can use two, but we used one.
- Stick one contact paper shape to one of the frames. (It helps to unpeel as you stick.) Turn sticky side UP!
- Lay your materials on the sticky side and attach the other contact paper shape so you’ve sealed them inside.
- Hang or display.



Selecting material and sticking them down courtesy Jennifer Ruscilli



Pressing impressions in clay courtesy Jennifer Ruscilli



Painted shamrock made from hearts, and trinket bowl courtesy Jennifer Ruscilli

FEBRUARY GARDENING TIPS



Photo rose courtesy UGA. For more information on pruning, click [HERE](#).

Ornamentals

Late February is the time to prune hybrid tea and Knock Out Roses®. Remove old canes, lowering plant to a height of 12-15 inches. Prune out dead and damaged canes leaving the center open for air flow.

Apply a drop of white glue to the end of fresh cut canes to prevent borers. Fertilize using a fertilizer heavy in potassium (K). Remove all debris and apply fresh mulch. For more rose pruning info click [HERE](#).

- Winter is a good time to prune deciduous trees and shrubs that don't bloom in the spring. It allows you to view the trunk and branches when making your cuts. For guidelines on pruning ornamental plants in the landscape, click [HERE](#).
- Use a new plant light to grow seedlings. Older, partially used bulbs may not give off sufficient light.
- Continue to fertilize pansies and other winter annuals with fertilizer high in nitrate nitrogen. For success with winter pansies and annuals, click [HERE](#).
- Prune clumps of ornamental grass before new growth appears. Tie large clumps with rope; cut with a hedge trimmer. For care and maintenance of ornamental grasses, click [HERE](#).

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

- Peaches grow best when maintained with an open center (no central leader). Keep 3 or 4 strong, scaffold branches evenly distributed around the trunk. Limbs that branch out at a 60° angle are preferred. Spreaders can be used to widen narrow crotch angles. For more information on growing peaches, click [HERE](#).
- Prune fruit trees and grapes in late February or early March after the worst of the winter cold is passed but before spring growth begins when temps maintain at 45°. For disease and insect control, cut out dead wood and dispose of the prunings. After each cut, disinfect pruners with rubbing alcohol, or nine parts water to one part bleach. Take care because both mixtures can cause damage to grass or other plants. For more information on pruning fruit trees, click [HERE](#), and pruning grapes, click [HERE](#).
- Remember that vegetable seeds have a short life of only a year or two. This includes sweet corn, onion, okra, beans, parsnip, and peppers.

- Consider the family vacation when planning your garden. Choose planting dates and varieties so your garden won't be ready for a full harvest while you are away. For a vegetable garden calendar resource, click [HERE](#).
- Before working an area in the garden for early spring planting, check the soil. It should be dry enough to crumble in your hands, so that you don't compact the soil while working it.
- Don't start your vegetable plants indoors too early. Six weeks ahead of the expected planting date is early enough for the fast growing species such as cabbage. Eight weeks allows enough time for the slow growing types such as tomatoes and peppers. Handle seed packets with care. Rubbing the outside to determine how many seeds are inside can break the protective seed coats, thereby reducing germination. For more information on seed starting, click [HERE](#).



Seed starting tray. For more tray options, click [HERE](#).

MISCELLANEOUS

- To make old hay and manure weed-free, spread on the soil in late winter, water well, and cover with black plastic. Weed seeds will sprout after a few days of warm weather, and then will be killed by frost and lack of daylight.
- Hang or clean out bluebird houses now before the birds start looking for a home. Don't clean them on a windy day.
- Clean and disinfect clay pots by soaking them in a solution of one part liquid bleach and nine parts water. Rinse thoroughly to remove all bleach residue. This will have your containers ready to plant with spring annuals.

RAINFALL COMPARISONS

	Cherokee County			State Wide		
	Nov 2022	Dec 2022	YTD 2022	Nov 2022	Dec 2022	YTD 2022
Actual	4.6	7.1	53.3	5.8	3.0	46.8
Normal	4.4	4.7	53.5	3.8	4.6	48.5
Deviation	0.2	2.4	-0.2	2.0	-1.6	-1.7

MARCH GARDENING TIPS

ORNAMENTALS

- Be aware that a brown plastic material that looks and feels like natural burlap, but does not break down in the soil, may be used to wrap root balls of B & B plants. Synthetic materials enclosing the roots of trees and shrubs must be completely removed to ensure success of the transplants. **Planting techniques for trees can be found [HERE](#).**
- Prune crape myrtles only removing the old flower heads. Do not cut back to the same spot each year as it creates a weak joint and the branches can split and fall in the summer with the additional weight of heavy flower heads. Remove sprouts at the base of the tree. **For information on crape myrtle growing and maintenance, click [HERE](#).**
- Cut back butterfly bushes to 1/3 desired height.
- Divide daylily and hosta clumps when the leaves just start to emerge from the ground so you don't damage the new growth. **For more hosta info, click [HERE](#).**
- If you have left a few inches of plant stems on your perennials to ID the plant's location cut them back before the new growth emerges. It is also a good time to cut back the tattered foliage on evergreen ferns and perennials. **For more info on flowering perennial care, click [HERE](#).**
- Fertilize spring bulbs after they bloom. Do not remove leaves until they turn yellow.
- Give your roses a starter application of complete fertilizer.
- Start fertilizing pansies and winter annuals with houseplant fertilizer.

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

- Don't rush to remove mulch from strawberries. Leave it over your plants to protect them from late cold spells. When plants start to grow, the mulch must be removed to allow leaves to develop in the light. If leaves develop under the mulch, they will become etiolated (blanched) and yellow from lack of chlorophyll, and may burn and die when exposed to the sun. **For more info on home gardening and strawberries, click [HERE](#).**
- If your garden is on a hillside, plant across the slope (not up and down) to help hold moisture in the soil and reduce erosion.
- Plant seeds of root crops, such as carrots, beets, radishes and parsnips, in your garden.
- Begin summer vegetable seedlings inside now.
- Spring applications of pesticides should be made on peaches, apples and pears. Correct timing for spraying depends on the stage of development of flowers. Check the label and follow the directions.

- Lettuce is very sensitive to low pH. Lime should be applied to the soil if the pH is below 6.0. **For more information on growing home garden lettuce, click [HERE](#).**
- Do not add lime to the area for potatoes. The lower pH helps control scab. **For more information on growing home garden potatoes, click [HERE](#).**



Evidence of severe "Crape Murder".
To avoid aggressive pruning, click [HERE](#).

MISCELLANEOUS

- Place bird houses outdoors early this month. Birds will begin looking for nesting sites soon and the houses should attract several mating pairs. Ideally, houses erected on smooth metal poles where predators cannot climb are most often selected, but placement on top of fence posts or in trees will usually suffice. **For more info on how to attract birds to your landscape, click [HERE](#).**
- Spring is a good time to install nest boxes and hole size is very important for cavity-nesting birds. **For more information on cavity nesting birds and sizes, click [HERE](#).**
- The purple martin (*Progne subis*) isn't a year-round bird in Georgia, but arrives in southern Georgia in early February, reaches northern Georgia by mid-February, and then leaves during the fall. With increasing interest in our environment and nonchemical pest control, the martin is regaining popularity. **For more information and facts about purple martins, click [HERE](#).**
- Put out hummingbird feeders in mid-March, and make sure the roosting material has been cleaned out of your bluebird houses after winter.



Photo hummingbird feeders courtesy John Ruscilli



Recipes

Chicken and Dumplings From Maurya Jones

INGREDIENTS:

2 Tbsp. butter
3 chicken breasts
Salt and pepper
1/2 cup sliced carrots
1/2 cup sliced celery
1 whole medium onion, diced
6 cups low sodium chicken broth
2 cans of cream of chicken soup
For the dumplings: 1 can Grand Biscuits cut in quarters

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Sprinkle chicken breasts with salt and pepper and bake at 275 degrees for 45 minutes or until shreddable.
2. In large pot, melt butter over medium heat; stir and cook carrots, celery, and onion for 3 to 4 minutes; pour in chicken broth, cover pot, and simmer for 20 minutes.
3. While vegetables are simmering, cut biscuits into quarters and shred the chicken.
4. Add cream of chicken soup and shredded chicken to simmering pot, stirring gently.
5. Drop quartered biscuits into simmering pot, cover, and continue to simmer for 15 minutes.



Courtesy Maurya Jones

Oven Roasted Brussels Sprouts with Bacon From Maurya Jones

INGREDIENTS:

1 lb. Brussels sprouts (ends removed and halved)
2 Tbsp. olive oil
4 slices thick-cut bacon
1/4 cup half-and-half
Salt and pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
2. Place Brussels sprouts in a 9 x 13 glass baking dish. Drizzle olive oil over the sprouts, and mix to cover evenly. Add salt and pepper to taste.
3. Roast the sprouts for 25 minutes.
4. While roasting the sprouts, cook and crumble the bacon, saving 1 Tbsp. of bacon grease.
5. Mix bacon grease and half-and-half together.
6. Toss half-and-half mixture with the roasted sprouts and bacon. Serve immediately.

This is delicious as a side dish or a yummy appetizer.



Courtesy Maurya Jones



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