

Mercer County Extension Horticulture Newsletter

From The Ground Up

December, 2025

Are you still on the search for the perfect gift for the plant lover in your family? It's not too late to get them a gift card to their favorite garden center, a new water hose, garden gloves or maybe a new pair of pruners. Think about all the things that will be helpful in the spring, even if you can't use them right now. Wishing you and your family a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Happy Gardening!

Jessica Bessin

Jessica Bessin,
Mercer County Extension Agent for Horticulture



Keeping Fresh Greens Fresh

Do you enjoy decorating with fresh greens each year? Whether you chose to put a wreath on the door, or a fresh cut tree there are a few things you can do to keep them looking great this holiday season. If you are collecting your own greenery to make a wreath, cut branches at an angle to form a larger surface area, this allows max absorption of water. Stand cut branches in water in a cool dark area until you are ready to use. After putting your wreath together you can spray the dry foliage with anti-desiccant to help seal in the moisture, these are commonly sold as wilt-proof. Avoid spraying these wilt-proof products on blue spruce and juniper berries, the waxy coating will discolor them. Another thing to consider is location, make sure not to place fresh greenery near a heat source. Placed too closely to a heat source will speed up needle drop.



When it comes to a fresh cut tree in your home we have three easy steps to keep it lasting all season long. 1. Pick out a fresh tree. This is easily done when you cut it yourself, but what if you're buying one at the store? To check the freshness of a tree at a tree lot, try the "pull test." Grab a shoot with your thumb and forefinger and run them along to the end. If the tree is fresh, the needles shouldn't come off. 2. Make a fresh cut. Cut 1 inch or more off the base of the tree this will help increase water uptake. If the tree has been cut within six-eight hours no need to re-cut, but if it is longer you will want to cut again. 3. Fresh water. Christmas trees absorb a lot of water their first week being displayed. A 4 inch diameter trunk may use more than a gallon of water a day. Check your tree stand daily, don't let the water fall below the trunk bottom. It's often advertised to place additives in your Christmas tree stand such as aspirin, bleach, sugar, and essential oils. All of these can cause needle drop, the best thing for your tree is plain tap water.

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Disabilities
accommodated
with prior notification

KENTUCKY

Fruit & Vegetable Conference

2025

BOWLING GREEN, KY | JANUARY 11-13

SLOAN CONVENTION CENTER

REGISTER TODAY

<https://kentuckyhorticulturecouncil.ticketquest.com/2025flyattm005e>

Winter Seed Sowing

Did you know you can start perennial flower seeds outside in January?

Join us as we discuss winter seed sowing and make our own milk jug planters. Everyone will get their own planter with perennial flower seeds.

Please RSVP by January 9th to 859-734-4378.

Mercer County Extension Office

1007 Lexington Road

Harrodsburg, KY 40330

Mercer County Extension Council invites you to our

Big Blue Open House

Thursday, December 11

4:00-6:30pm

See how Extension can be a benefit for you and your family! Meet your county agents and learn more about the programs we have to offer. We will have appetizers, refreshments, holiday crafts, and door prizes. Family-friendly event, all ages welcome.

Take your picture with Santa!

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1007 Lexington Road

Harrodsburg, KY 40330

Kickin' Greens

2 tablespoons olive oil

8 slices turkey bacon, cut into bite-sized pieces

1 large onion, chopped

6 cloves garlic, minced

2 pounds fresh greens (collards, turnip or mustard)

3 cups low sodium chicken broth

½ teaspoon black pepper

¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes, or to taste

Heat olive oil in a large stockpot over medium high heat. **Cook** turkey bacon in hot oil until crisp. **Add** onion and garlic. **Cook** until onion is tender, **stirring** occasionally. **Add** greens and **stir** until greens start to wilt. **Add** chicken broth, black pepper and red pepper flakes. **Cover**, reduce heat to low and **simmer** 25-30 minutes, or until greens are tender.

Yield: 8, 1 cup servings

Nutritional Analysis: 110 calories, 6 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat, 10 mg cholesterol, 9 g carbohydrate, 5 g fiber, 2 g sugars, 7 g protein.

Butternut and Acorn Squash Soup

1 butternut squash, halved and seeded

1 acorn squash, halved and seeded

1 tablespoon olive oil

¼ cup chopped sweet onion

4 cups chicken broth

3 tablespoons peanut butter

½ cup packed brown sugar

½ teaspoon ground black pepper

¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon

¼ teaspoon nutmeg

Fresh parsley for garnish

Using a vegetable peeler, **remove** the skin from the butternut and acorn squashes and **cut** into 1-inch cubes. In a large soup pot, **heat** the oil on medium high. **Add** the onion, and **cook** 1 to 2 minutes until it starts to become translucent. **Add** cubed squash, and cook 4 to 5 minutes. **Add** chicken broth, and bring to a boil. **Lower** heat, and **simmer** 30 to 35 minutes, until the squash is fork tender. Allow to **cool** slightly, then **blend** until smooth in a food processor or blender. **Return** mixture to the pot, and **heat** to medium low. **Add** peanut butter, brown sugar, pepper, cinnamon, and nutmeg. **Stir** until well blended. **Garnish** with fresh parsley. **Serve** warm.

Yield: 7, 1-cup servings

Nutritional Analysis: 200 calories, 6 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 5 mg cholesterol, 600 mg sodium, 36 g carbohydrate, 4 g fiber, 14 g sugar, 10 g added sugar, 4 g protein.

Cluster Flies

Cluster flies, they are the gift that keeps on giving this holiday season. I have unfortunately been dealing with these annoying flies since September. Just when I think I have them all vacuumed up, they are back again clustering around a window trying to escape. Thankfully these flies are not breeding and constitute no health hazard. These flies are collectively called "clustering flies" but may actually be any of three groups or types of flies ; cluster flies, face flies, and blow flies. All three types of flies will love to come spend the winter with you indoors.

The ones I have been dealing with and have received calls about are cluster flies. They usually appear in late fall or early winter and again on warm, sunny days in early spring. They buzz around and gather in large numbers at windows, often in rooms that are not regularly used. The cluster fly is a little larger than the common housefly and moves sluggishly. It can be recognized by the short, golden colored hairs on its thorax, the part of the body to which the legs and wings are attached. The larvae, or maggots, of cluster flies develop as parasites in the bodies of earthworms.

The adult flies emerge in late summer and early fall and seek protected places to spend the winter. In many cases, this is within the walls, attics and basements of homes. Window screens offer no protection from the flies because they crawl in the home through small openings in the walls of the building. These same overwintering flies get into rooms during the winter and spring months entering through window pulley holes, around the baseboards and through other small openings in walls.

What about control? There are insecticide options that can be applied outside of the house where you see flies gathering to warm up in the sun. The other option is to close and seal as many openings as possible which the flies can enter, this can be around windows, baseboard and even ceiling fans. Finally, I am becoming good friends with my vacuum. These flies are sluggish and easy to vacuum up, just be prepared to have your vacuum ready on warm winter days.

The Mercer County Extension Office is closed

December 24th, 2025 through January 2nd, 2026 for the holiday season!

Mark Those Calendars!!

Holiday Open House-December 11th, Mercer County Extension Office

See insert for more details.

Harrodsburg Tree Board Meeting– December 15th, Mercer County Extension Office 5:00 PM

Mercer County Extension District Board Meeting-January 6th, Mercer County Extension Office 5:00 PM

County Extension Council Meeting (CEC)-January 8th, Mercer County Extension Office 6:00 PM

Fruit and Vegetable Conference-January 11-13th, Bowling Green-Sloan Convention Center

Use the QR code above to register and find out more information about this great conference!

Winter Sowing-January 15th, Mercer County Extension Office 10:00 AM

See flyer for more details.

Harrodsburg Tree Board Meeting– January 19th, Mercer County Extension Office 5:00 PM

Fort Harrod Bee Club-January 26th, Mercer County Extension Office 6:30 PM

Join us for our first meeting of the year. Annual dues are \$10 per family. All are welcome, even if you choose not to become a member at this time. Make sure to check out the Fort Harrod Beekeeping Facebook page for all the latest updates and announcements!

Organic Association of Kentucky Annual Conference (OAK)-January 30th-31st, KSU Research and Demo. Farm

Register now for OAK's 15th Annual Organic Farming Conference, *Cultivating Connections: Growing Organic Together for 15 Years*. Early bird registration discount available through December 15th. Visit the following link to register: <https://www.oak-ky.org/registration>

Commercial Vegetable Grower Update-February 5th, 9th, & 19th– 7:00 PM Via-Zoom

See insert for more details.

Beginning Gardener Basics-February 21st, Boyle County Extension Office 9:00 AM-12:00 PM

See flyer for more details.

Fort Harrod
BeeKeeping Club

Beginner Gardening Basics

Saturday, February 21
9:00am—12:00pm

Calling all new gardeners!

Join the Boyle and Mercer County Horticulture Agents as they share information on gardening 101, seed starting, composting, common diseases, and insect pests.

Each participant will go home with a new gardener kit!

RSVP by February 13 to 859-734-4378



Boyle County Extension Office
99 Corporate Drive—Danville, KY 40422

Commercial Vegetable Grower Update

All classes will be offered via Zoom
at 7:00pm EST/6:00pm CST. Zoom links to join meetings
will be sent out on the day of class.

February 5—Plant Pathology Update

Dr. Nicole Gauthrie-UK Extension Specialist for Plant Pathology

February 12—Entomology Update

UK Dr. Ric Bessin-Extension Specialist for Entomology

February 19—Farmers Market Update

Sharon Spencer -KY Dept. of Ag Director for Direct Farm



Register here:
tinyurl.com/vegetableupdate



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