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SOLUTIONS

Newsletter of the Alamance County Cooperative Extension Service

Extension Is Blooming!

Mark S. Danieleley, CES Director

Spring is here and Alamance County Cooperative Extension is blooming. Everyone is busy with spring events and we are planning for upcoming summer programs. That is a pleasant change from our winter activities. Rett's prediction of a bad winter turned out to be accurate. Snow, ice and cold weather were a real problem. We had to cancel and reschedule many classes due to bad weather. Trying to contact 30-40 people to inform them of a class cancellation and then finding another date for the class was a little stressful. I think by the end of April we will be back on schedule.



The recent good weather we have had has brought the home gardeners out in force. The number of calls, emails, and office visitors with gardening questions has increased noticeably in the past couple of weeks. Everyone is rushing to get the

shrubbery pruned and the lawn fertilized. I have seen tomato plants in the garden stores and while it might be a little early to plant tomatoes, it is a good sign that spring is on the way.

We look forward to providing solutions to your requests this spring. Whether your interest is traditional row crops and livestock, programs for youth or your home lawn and garden, we are here to help.

Mark S. Danieleley

Calendar Updates

- Thurs., Apr. 9 10:00 **THINK GREEN THURSDAY** - Vegetable Gardening 101
Fri., Apr. 10 8:30-4:00 Animal Waste Management Operators Continuing Education Training, Randolph County
Sat., Apr. 11 10:00-4:00 - Homegrown In the Park - Burlington City Park
Wed., Apr. 15 - Thurs., Apr. 16 Central Piedmont Jr. Livestock Show & Sale
Tues., Apr. 14 12:30p ACCA Annual Field Day - Snow Camp
Sat., Apr. 18 8:00-1:00 Household Hazardous Waste Disposal Day (see page 2)
Thurs., Apr. 23 10:00 **THINK GREEN THURSDAY** - Totally Tomatoes!
Tues., Apr. 28 5:30-7:30pm Area Pastured Poultry Workshop
Thurs., May 7 10:00 **THINK GREEN THURSDAY** - Perennials w/C Carol Kawula
Thurs., May 21 10:00 **THINK GREEN THURSDAY** - Pollinator Gardening with Natives
Thurs., Jun. 4 10:00 **THINK GREEN THURSDAY** - Rain Water Catchment
Thurs., Jun. 18 10:00 **THINK GREEN THURSDAY** - Birds in The Garden
Thurs., Jul. 9 10:00 **THINK GREEN THURSDAY** - Preserving Your Bounty
Thurs., Jul. 23 10:00 **THINK GREEN THURSDAY** - Fall Vegetable Gardening

For more information and to register
Call 336.570.6740 or visit
<http://alamance.ces.ncsu.edu/>

NC State University
A&T State University
**COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION**

Empowering People • Providing Solutions

Spring is Blooming Buggy!

by: Mark Danielely, Horticulture Agent

Spring is my favorite time of the year. All the trees are green again and there is something in bloom all the time. Another sight we see in the spring is the reappearance of a great number of insects. The cold weather we had this past winter will have little effect on the insect population. Some insects overwinter as adults and some overwinter in the egg stage. In any case, when warm weather returns so will the insects. The good news is most of the insects we see are beneficial or at least not harmful. Only about 1% of the insects in our yards are actually pests.

The first step to consider before spraying for a perceived insect problem is to properly identify the insect. Since 99% of the insects we see are not bad guys there may not be a need to spray the bug that you found in your yard. While there are some insects that are easy to identify, I am not suggesting that everyone should become an amateur entomologist. Insect identification can be tricky and searching the Internet may not give you a good answer. The best solution for identifying an unknown insect is to contact our office. You can send us a picture or bring a sample to the office. Once we have a positive identification, we can talk about what you might need to do.



If the insect has been identified as a possible pest problem, the next thing to consider is will the insect do enough damage to justify treatment? There may be very few insects present and the damage they do is minimal and the insects may not need to be treated. The other possibility is that there could be a large number of insects, but they don't cause any significant harm.

One example is the eastern tent caterpillar. They appear in the spring and favor trees like wild cherry, apple and crabapple. They build a tent in the crotch of the trees to protect themselves from predators and feed on the tree leaves. While there may be a large number of caterpillars present, their defoliation rarely damages the tree. The best method to control the caterpillars is to take a stick and destroy the tent. That exposes them to predators and usually solves the problem. I have seen some people set fire to the tents and, while that is an effective control for the caterpillars, the fire normally kills the tree. This is not a recommended practice.



Proper pest identification and control can sometimes be a little difficult, but we are here to help. It may be that the insect that has you concerned won't really be a problem and there isn't a need to buy a pesticide and spray. I have always heard a penny saved is a penny earned. I like to think that pennies saved can be used to buy some ice cream.



Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day

The next Collection Day will be Saturday, April 18, from 8 am until 1 pm at 100 Stone Quarry Road, Haw River. The types of hazardous waste that will be accepted are as follows:

- ☺ Household cleaners, drain openers, toilet bowl cleaners, oven cleaners, disinfectants
- ☺ Solvents, thinners, shellacs, varnishes, sealers, wood preservatives
- ☺ Automotive products including brake fluid, antifreeze, used motor oil up to 5 gal, filters, gasoline
- ☺ Pesticides
- ☺ Miscellaneous materials such as acids, bases, kerosene, batteries, photographic chemicals, pool chemicals, mercury, fluorescent tubes
- ☺ Latex and oil based paint and spray paint



The following will NOT be accepted: Gas cylinders, radioactives/smoke detectors, medical waste, electronics/TVs/computers, explosives/ammunition



4-H Summer SHINE – Helping Kids Bloom When School is OUT!

Erin Bain, 4-H Agent



It's that time of year again! Even though schools will still be session for a while longer, it's never too early to start thinking about how your children will spend the summer. We have activities scheduled from June until August that will help youth here in Alamance County stay active and excited about learning throughout the summer months. All 4-H Programs are planned with the philosophy of "Learn By Doing" in mind and are both fun AND educational.

4-H Programs are open to all youth ages 5-18 and we have a variety of programs scheduled for each age group. More information will be available in April, so keep checking our website for more information: <http://alamance.ces.ncsu.edu>. Registration dates are May 11-15 for 4-H families only, then May 18-22 for non-4-H families. Registration is done by appointment ONLY and you MUST call ahead for an appointment. You can make an appointment as soon as the 4-H Summer SHINE brochure is up and running on our website, which should be mid-April. Below are just a FEW of the many exciting programs we have planned.

-  Kayaking
-  Youth Farm Tour
-  Robotics
-  CSI – Crime Scene Investigation
-  Sculpting
-  Gardening
-  Fishing
-  Crafts
-  Yoga

And Much, Much More!

More information about the Alamance County 4-H Summer SHINE Programs can be found on our website at <http://alamance.ces.ncsu.edu> or by calling or stopping by the Alamance County Cooperative Extension Office. If you have any questions, please contact Erin Bain, 4-H Agent at 570-6740 or email her at efbain@ncsu.edu



Written By: Lauren Langley, Livestock Extension Agent

It seems like backyard chicken flocks are popping up everywhere in Alamance County these days. I get a lot of questions about raising a few chickens for eggs and/or meat. A couple of things need to be considered before you purchase your first chicken:

1: Do you live in a chicken-friendly area?

For instance, if you live within city limits, you may want to read the zoning ordinances first, some allow chickens, some do not. Most city limit ordinances state that the birds must be contained (not at-large), that you cannot have a rooster and the quantity of chickens allowed. If you are outside of the city limits, but still live close to your neighbors, it is a good idea to check with them first so conflict does not arise.



2: Do you want chickens for eggs, meat, or both?

Depending on what you want your chickens for will help determine which breed you purchase. If you want chickens for egg production, you may want to look at Barred Rocks or Rhode Island Reds, for example. What about egg shell color? If you want brown eggs, you may want to consider a breed that lays brown eggs such as Buff Orpingtons. There are breeds better suited for egg laying, meat, and some breeds that are considered dual-purpose.

A neat breed selection tool can be found here:

<http://www.mypetchicken.com/chicken-breeds/which-breed-is-right-for-me.aspx>

3: Do you want to hatch your chicks from eggs, buy newly hatched chicks, or buy older chickens?

You may think you want to incubate and hatch your own eggs, who doesn't? But, are you ready for that kind of commitment and realization that all eggs may not hatch? I would suggest leaving it to the experts unless you have experience hatching eggs in an incubator. Source your chicks or

pullets carefully, make sure they have been vaccinated and started correctly before you purchase. Keep in mind, pullets will start to lay eggs at 16 to 24 weeks of age depending on breed. This is important because it takes time if you are raising hens from chicks. Meat birds can be slaughtered at 4-5 weeks old (fryers), 6-9 weeks old (broilers), and 9-14 weeks old (roasters).

1: Do you want to build a permanent or mobile chicken coop?

We are starting to get into the details now, but this is probably the most important detail next to choosing your chickens. If you go with a permanent coop, make sure it is what you want and can be easily cleaned since you cannot move it. It will be best to have a screened in yard so chickens can forage even in a permanent area. A mobile coop gives you more flexibility in spreading nutrients and for foraging. Chickens can receive 5-20% of their diet from forages, seeds, bugs, etc. They enjoy foraging and it is good for overall health.

Overall, having a few chickens around can be a fun adventure for the whole family! I typically do a spring and fall program on backyard chickens so make sure you keep an eye out and attend one of my workshops! In the meantime, please email or call me if you have livestock-related questions.



Organic Tobacco is Blooming in Alamance County

By: Dwayne Dabbs, Field Crops Agent.

Tobacco has been a staple crop for Alamance County and the State of North Carolina bringing in over \$900 million to the state's economy last year. However, as you drive down the road this year, you will definitely notice less tobacco planted compared to previous years.

First let me explain how the system works. Back in 2004, the tobacco quota system was removed and money was paid over ten years to reimburse people for their quotas. Tobacco quotas served as the amount of tobacco a farmer could plant and then sell on the open market per year, so the more quota you had, the more tobacco you could plant. The old system was replaced with tobacco companies contracting pounds with individual farmers on a per yearly basis. Some contracts were made for more than a year, but most were on a yearly basis. This gave tobacco companies more control of the market and they set their prices as they saw fit, mainly because they would only guarantee to buy the number of pounds on the contract and only if it met their specifications. This is how most of the tobacco farmers grew their crops for that ten year period of time, and for the most part it worked fairly well. However, the rug was pulled out from under the feet of a lot of the tobacco producers in Alamance County, along with the majority of the State of North Carolina this year. Producer's contracts were cut dramatically, from twenty five percent to no contract at all. So growers had to find an alternative to continue growing tobacco and the only answer to stay in the tobacco business was organic tobacco production.

First the producer had to get a contract from a company that would be contracting organic tobacco. There are only two companies that are doing this: Swiss Organic and



Santa Fe, a branch of Reynolds Tobacco Company. Since companies were scarce and it is a niche market, contracts were for much smaller amounts than conventional companies would normally award. Once this has been taken care of, the farmers have to find land that has not had any synthetic materials put on it in the past three years, which is a challenge in itself. Once the land has been secured, a third-party certification group is brought in to certify the land for organic production. Some of the producers will be doing a transition program to gain full organic certification.

Organic tobacco production is very similar to the practices done by other organic commodities here in Alamance and other places in the state. Only organic certified fertilizers and pesticides can be used on the crop. So that brings in a lot more labor than conventional tobacco requires and that is saying quite a bit. Most conventional farmers can apply a few herbicides at planting and this gives them a few extra weeks before they will have to plow to remove weeds. With organic production, from the time it is planted until the producer can no longer get over the tobacco with the tractor, they will be plowing it. After that point, hand weeding will be required, which is a costly endeavor. The pesticides that can be used are very limited for insects. So, depending on how the weather is this summer, workers may be going through the fields and pulling insects by hand, too.

It will definitely be an interesting year for me as well as the producers; working with a new puzzle that hasn't been put together like conventional tobacco has been for the past thirty years.

If you have any questions about this or any other field crop situations, please don't hesitate to give me a call, and I will try to help any way I can.

What's That Blooming In Your Pond?

By: Dwayne Dabbs, Field Crops Agent.

Since the weather is starting to warm up, pond weeds will be coming back in your ponds. If you have a weed that is starting to become a problem, collect a sample and bring it here to the office. I can identify what the weed is and we can talk about what you can do to fix the problem. If it is a larger plant, make sure that you bring in enough of the plant so that I can identify it. I don't want to make you make multiple trips here to the office, if it is possible.



Watch For Slow Rollers

By: Dwayne Dabbs, Field Crops Agent.

As always be careful going down the road because it is time for farmers to start moving equipment, to get fields ready for the coming season. So if you see a tractor or other farm equipment going down the road please slow down because you don't know how wide the implement it is hauling is, and you don't know who may be in front or behind them.

Edible Flowers: Blooming Delicious!

~Chris Stecker, Horticulture Technician

Cooks' rules:

Everything on the plate must be edible.

So, when I was served a dish garnished with an orchid at a fancy restaurant, I ate it! It was pretty tasty, and it made me think of all the possibilities from the garden, some I have cooked with, eaten and loved, and some I have yet to try.

NC Cooperative Extension has a new publication to help you determine which flowers to eat, what they taste like and what caveats you should heed when selecting blossoms to eat:

<http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/choosing-and-using-edible-flowers-ag-790.pdf>



Check here to make sure that flower isn't on the Poisonous Plants list:

<http://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/category/poisonous-plants/>

After you determine that the flowers you'd like to use are safe to eat, taste them to see how they would best be used. For example, chive blossoms make an elegant garnish and the mild, onion-y taste would be a perfect addition to a savory salad. Lavender, on the other hand, with its intensely floral scent, is better suited for sweets—cakes, cookies and even lemonade.

Pansies, with their more neutral flavor, can really go either way—add them to a salad or top a cupcake.



Redbud blossoms? Edible!
Daylilies? Edible!
Squash blossoms? Edible—and delicious stuffed and fried. Don't worry about reducing the number of zucchini or yellow squash you harvest; just use the male blossoms. As long as you leave a couple for the ladies, you'll still get plenty of fruit.

CAUTION:

Avoid flowers:

- grown in soil fertilized with untreated animal manure within four months prior to harvest;
- grown on the roadside;
- purchased at a florist, garden center, or nursery unless labeled as edible; or
- that may have been sprayed with pesticides not labeled for use on food.

