

Home & Garden

2021

THE DISPATCH

Sunday, March 28, 2021

Daffodils on the campus of Mississippi State University
Photo by Tyler Jones

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Gardening to support bees

Story by Garrick Hodge
ghodge@cdispatch.com

It's no secret bees are an important part of agriculture. According to a study from Cornell University, the estimated yearly monetary value of the production of honeybees and native bees alike in the United States equates to around \$29 billion in farm income.

"Bees are very important," said Nancy Reeves, president of the Lowndes County Master Gardeners. "They're very important for pollinating our food, pollinating flowers and producing honey. I personally enjoy honey and think it has health benefits."

So, as spring rounds the corner, there are several things Golden Triangle residents can do while gardening that will go an extra mile in supporting bees.

"If I was a gardener, I'd encourage gardeners to think of plants that are going to help our native insects, butterflies, moths and native bees," said Jeff Harris, a honey bee specialist at Mississippi State's Extension Service. "Plant for them, and that will help honeybees. The one reason we want to encourage people to use native plants is there's this whole food chain that depends on native plants. If you plant a non-native plant, many of the insect species don't recognize it as food."

According to an article published on MSU's Extension website, some of those regional plants honey bees are attracted to include coneflower, coreopsis, goldenrod, yarrow and American holly. Herbs that honey bees are attracted to include basil, oregano, thyme, rosemary, sage and Comfrey (which can be used as fertilizer), according to MSU Extension. White, blue and violet flowers may be the color preference of some bees. Toxic plants to avoid are rhododendrons, azaleas, and Carolina jessamine.

"There are good plants and bad plants," Reeves said. "You want to stay away from toxic plants."

It is recommended by MSU Extension that a gardener plants individual species of flowers in large groups or drifts. If this is not desired or feasible, plant small groups of the same species throughout the garden bed, spaced no more than a few yards apart, so bees can easily "hop" from one group to the next.

Being careful with insecticide sprays is another crucial element of assisting



Photos courtesy Jeff Harris

An American Bumble Bee and an American Buckeye are shown pollinating a flower. Jeff Harris, a bee specialist at Mississippi State's Extension Service, recommends gardeners plant native plants and avoid spraying pesticides when a flower is booming to support both native bees and honeybees.

pollinators. Each gardener should read an insecticide label carefully and never spray an insecticide for a pest problem when a plant is in bloom, Harris says.

"What happens is you coat the flowers and the pollinators are drawn in and have contact with the insecticides and can cause a lot of harm."

Spraying at later times in the day is always ideal for pollinators, Harris said. Bees have a maximum flight activity of going to flowers from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., so a good time to spray is around 4 p.m.

Meanwhile, gardeners are encouraged to resist temptation to cut their lawns too early, because a negative consequence may be making life uncomfortable for bees.

"We keep our lawns way too clean," Harris said. "We get rid of nesting habitats for our native bees. They nest in the ground and they need untilled, undisturbed areas."





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Buy, build or flip?

Local Realtors recommend first-time home owners buy move-in ready homes and invest carefully in upgrades

Story by Isabelle Altman
ialtman@cdispach.com

Affordability, rate of return and the costs of repairs and upkeep — those are the factors potential buyers should keep in mind when searching for their first ever home, whether they plan to flip it or just move straight in.

The most important thing for first-time homeowners to know, said Realtor Colin Krieger with RE/MAX, is they don't need the long-spouted "20 percent down" to purchase a home.

"For most of the people in our area, they're actually putting less than 5 percent on a house, and quite a few don't put any money down and still get great interest rates for that," he said.

That doesn't mean they shouldn't take affordability into consideration. Realtor Doris Hardy of Century 21 Doris Hardy and Associates cautioned first-time homeowners to look at all aspects of the home's upkeep, as well as the actual sale price.

"They don't think of window treatments, blinds or anything else," Hardy said. "They look at a house and they have no idea of what the cost of annual maintenance is. That's very important to educate them on that because that determines — when they sell their house — will they be on the short end of the stick and not break even, or, based on what they have purchased and put into it, will they break even, or will they actually realize a profit?"

While "flipping homes" has been a trend for years, both Krieger and Hardy said homeowners — especially those inexperienced in ownership and major renovation projects — should be careful about how they invest in a home,

especially since the COVID-19 pandemic has caused major delays in supply lines and huge increases in the cost of materials.

Krieger said it's becoming increasingly popular to purchase "move-in ready homes," preferably with roofs and HVAC systems that are fewer than 10 years old.

But whether you're moving in or flipping, Hardy recommended coming up with a list of "needs and non-negotiable wants" and a list of "wants." That list is where you have to be realistic about things like pools and outdoor kitchens.

"Those things are really fun and nice to have, but you have to look at your rate of return," she said. "(For pools) he who installs it takes the hit."

The pandemic has also brought to light the disadvantage of recent trends in home design. For years, homeowners had increasingly gone for open, spacious floor plans, but now the realities of working from home have made many people realize they want more privacy than those open floor plans often allow, Hardy said.

For investments and renovations that typically pay off, Hardy recommended making sure the materials used match the value of the home and aren't too updated or "high-end" for the rest of the house.

"Kitchens you get a quick rate of return, but the materials have to be appropriate for the house," she said.

Investments where it's hard to go wrong are "mother-in-law" suites, power-and-Wi-Fi-equipped shops and outdoor living like investments in landscaping.

Neither Krieger nor Hardy recommend first-time homeowners build their own home.

"It's probably the toughest time in the last 30 years to build a house as a first-time home buyer," Krieger said. "In the last 18 months, the price of wood has nearly tripled ... so the average new construction in our market [...] is approaching \$300,000 which is quite a bit above what most first-time home buyers want to spend."

He recommended those looking to buy begin shopping early, so they're familiar with the market by the time they're ready to make a down payment. Hardy added that home owners should get good counsel from a good Realtor. Both of these things will build buyers' confidence.

"Almost all of the houses in our entry-level price range are selling immediately," Krieger said, "and if you wait to get qualified until the day the house comes on the market and you haven't seen any other houses and you're not confident, then you're probably going to miss out on a few houses and have your heart broken."



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April 11 26

Basil	Sweet Marjoram
Catnip	Lemon Verbena
Coriander	Bay Laurel
Lavender	Borage
Lemongrass	Fennel
Mint	Summer Savory
Oregano	Anise
Rosemary	Salad Burnet
Sage	Costmary
Stevia	Ginger
Tarragon	

May 11 26

Basil	Bay Laurel
Catnip	Borage
Coriander	Fennel
Lemongrass	Summer Savory
Mint	Sweet Cicely
Oregano	Ginger
Rosemary	Sorrel
Stevia	Anise
Tarragon	Salad Burnet
Sweet Marjoram	Costmary
Lemon Verbena	

June 10 24

Basil	Borage
Catnip	Fennel
Coriander	Summer Savory
Lemongrass	Salad Burnet
Mint	Ginger
Oregano	
Rosemary	
Tarragon	
Sweet Marjoram	
Lemon Verbena	
Bay Laurel	

July 9 23

Basil	Summer Savory
Coriander	Salad Burnet
Lemongrass	Ginger
Mint	
Oregano	
Tarragon	
Sweet Marjoram	
Lemon Verbena	
Bay Laurel	
Borage	
Fennel	

August 8 22

Basil	Salad Burnet
Coriander	Ginger
Lemongrass	
Oregano	
Chamomile	
Tarragon	
Sweet Marjoram	
Lemon Verbena	
Bay Laurel	
Borage	
Fennel	

September 6 20

Basil	Chicory
Chives	Arugula
Coriander	Chervil
Dill	Ginger
Parsley	Salad Burnet
Tarragon	
Sweet Marjoram	
Lemon Verbena	
Bay Laurel	
Garlic	
Celery	

October 6 20

Basil	Arugula
Coriander	Chervil
Dill	Salad Burnet
Lavender	Ginger
Tarragon	
Sweet Marjoram	
Lemon Verbena	
Bay Laurel	
Garlic	
Celery	
Chicory	

November 4 19

December 4 18

January 2 17 31

February 16

Dill	
Garlic	
Celery	
Chicory	
Arugula	
Chervil	
Bergamont	

March 2 18

Chives	Lovage
Dill	Anise
Lemongrass	Bergamont
Parsley	
Thyme	
Garlic	
Celery	
Chicory	
Arugula	
Chervil	
Lemon Balm	

Reusing plant seeds are a cost-efficient and nostalgic gardening alternative

Story and Photo by Tyler B. Jones
tjones@cdspatch.com

When planning a garden, most people think to just buy new seeds from a store or nursery, but saving seeds from plants and vegetables and reusing them the following year is an option as well. While this process might be a bit tedious, it is a great way to retain beloved plants and be more cost-efficient.

"It depends on how well you take care of those seeds and save them," said Reid Nevins, an agent with Lowndes County Mississippi State University Extension Service. "It can be a difficult process."

When deciding on which seeds to save, the first step is to determine if the plant seed is an heirloom seed or a genetically modified seed. An heirloom seed is any variety of plant that has been in cultivation for at least fifty years, said Melvin Ellis, owner of Mayhew Tomato Farms. Modified seeds are seeds taken by breeders to get particular attributes into those plants.

The goal of genetically modified seeds is to get a seed that does not contain those unwanted characteristics such as tomato catfacing. Because these seeds have been distinctly altered, they never grow the same twice, so genetically modified seeds would not work in trying to reuse them.

"You know, your granddaddy may plant that special okra that always comes back the same way," said Raine Rosson, owner of local business, Rosson's Awesome Sauce. "That seed is probably an heirloom that goes back dozens of years."

Once someone has determined a seed is an heirloom, they must dry out the plant and pick out the seeds. The seeds then need to be stored in an envelope in a bit of indirect sunlight. They should not sit directly in the sun, but they need a fair amount of heat to completely dry out. Direct sunlight or too much heat could cause the seeds to lose their germination. Once the seeds are properly dried out, they must be reserved in a cool location such as a refrigerator. They should remain here at a constant temperature the entire off-season until they are ready to plant the following year.



“My grandparents were

the ones who taught me how to reuse seeds. When I was little, my grandfather would come in the door and say ‘Here’s a squash. Save your seed.’ It’s just something I grew up doing.”

— Raine Rosson

The philosophy behind reusing seeds is to keep the same plants and vegetables year after year. Many people prefer to save seeds because they love the nostalgia behind them.

"My grandparents were the ones who taught me how to reuse seeds," Rosson said. "When I was little, my grandfather would come in the door and say ‘Here’s a squash. Save your seed.’ It’s just something

I grew up doing."

Tomatoes and flowers such as zinnias and sunflowers are known to form well from heirloom seeds, but any plant seed can be saved for the following year as long as the process is carried out accurately.

While some people may prefer to continue buying their seeds in stores year after year, saving seeds is an excellent option for gardeners.

"As long as you get those heirloom seeds and you dry them out and store them properly, you should be successful with saving your seeds for the following year," Ellis said.



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In an anxious time, the garden still offers consolation

Story by **Julia Ruben**
The Associated Press

Deep into this pandemic, it can be hard to remember what a refuge gardens were last spring and summer.

In those frightening early days of COVID-19, victory gardens and household vegetable plots sprang up all over. Seed companies reported shortages. Hardware stores saw a run on garden tools. Millions found comfort, release and a sense of safety outdoors with their hands in the dirt.

That feels like a long time ago. We dreaded the winter season, and we weren't wrong: January was the deadliest month yet from the virus. Political violence shook Americans' sense of security and shared purpose. Businesses and household incomes are struggling. And the human interactions that might help us process all this anxiety and grief are discouraged.

Yet the garden is still there, hunkering down too. And it can still help, provide solace, inspiration and perspective. Fresh air and an assurance that spring is coming.

But what to do when we don't have gardens, live in apartments or during the next cold winter season?

"There are for many of us three gardens — the garden outdoors, the garden of pots and bowls in the house, and the garden of the mind's eye," Katherine S. White, an editor and writer at *The New Yorker* and an avid gardener, wrote several decades ago.

All three of those gardens offer a promise of light.

To the eye, there's little in a winter garden that can compare to spring and summer's binge-worthy drama of growing, blooming and buzzing. Only the most serious gardeners (or those in warmer climates) were able to keep the growing going outside during the winter, using cold frames, fabric or plastic tunnels, and other techniques.

But there are smaller joys to be had. The trees' bare branches make for beautiful silhouettes, and better views of birds and sunsets.



"The return of spring each year can be endlessly relied on, and in (plants) not dying when we die, we have a sense of goodness going forward," Sue Stratis-Smith writes in her new book, *"The Well-Gardened Mind: The Restorative Power of Nature."*

"This," she says, "is the garden's most enduring consolation."



iStock photos

lation."

Houseplants are hot now, and Instagram is full of plant influencers posting photos. New technologies make it easier to grow plants anywhere indoors, with or without soil. The plants offer not only beauty, but the rewards of caring for living things and seeing them grow.



Indoor vegetable gardening, too, has become especially popular both as a food source and as a family activity. For instance, you can buy organic mini-farms in Mason jars, cans and boxes — all intended for the windowsill. You can grow mushrooms in their cardboard box with just a spritzer, or set up a large jar of tomatoes adding nothing but water.

Sales of backyard greenhouses and grow lights are up,

and seed companies are already reporting another year of high demand.

Some gardeners have already started planting the seeds of cold-weather vegetables in flats indoors — seeing the sprouts of cabbage, onions, spinach and more. Now is the time, perhaps, they can think about transplanting them outdoors if they have the space.

Which brings us to the third garden: the one we imagine and plan.

"I shall never have the garden I have in my mind, but that for me is the joy of it; certain things can never be realized and so all the more reason to attempt them," the author/gardener Jamaica Kincaid once said.

The new seed catalogs carry the promise that, this year, you can make your garden better. Maybe that means converting more lawn to flowers and vegetables, choosing more native plants, reducing water use, putting in paths and water features. A garden is never finished.

Planning it is creative and hopeful. And as our second pandemic spring approaches, those hopes are being buoyed by the rollout of vaccines, too.

As Amanda Gorman said in her inauguration poem last month, in a shoutout to Lin-Manuel Miranda, who was quoting George Washington and Alexander Hamilton, who were quoting the Bible: "Everyone shall sit under their own vine, and fig tree, And no one shall make them afraid."

The garden as metaphor for peace, safety, prosperity, calm. Not a bad place for the mind's eye to rest, particularly in this most unsettling of winters.

Fresh Cucumber Ricotta Peppers

8 servings

15-20 minutes

Ingredients:

½ cup pecans
 6 tbsp olive oil
 4 peppers (can be substituted with eggplant or zucchini)
 1 ½ cups whole milk ricotta
 1 lemon
 3 cucumbers or 6 baby cucumbers (ca. 1 lb)
 1 cup mint leaves
 Salt
 Black pepper

Prep:

- Preheat oven to 350°F
- Wash & dry vegetables
- Cut cucumbers diagonally into 2 in long and 0.5 in thick slices
- Zest lemon

Spread pecans in a single layer on a baking sheet and place them in the upper third of the oven. Toast for 8-10 minutes, tossing them halfway through. Let the pecans cool, then place them in a towel and crush them with a flat bottomed cup or glass.

In the meantime heat 2 tbsp of olive oil in a cast iron skillet over medium high heat. Cook the peppers (in whole) for 6-8 minutes while turning them occasionally until the outside is lightly charred and the flesh is tender. Let the peppers cool slightly and depending on their size leave them whole or cut them into halves or quarters.

Mix ricotta, 2 tbsp of olive oil and the lemon zest and season with salt.

Squeeze lemon juice into a large bowl with 2 tbsp of olive oil and season it with salt. Combine the peppers, cucumbers, some mint leaves and half of the pecans in the bowl and toss to coat.

Transfer the vegetables along with juices from the bottom of the bowl onto a large platter, place spoonfuls of ricotta mixture on top and sprinkle the remaining pecans over the dish. Finally drizzle some more olive oil over the vegetables and season with black pepper.



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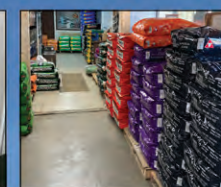
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