Forsyth Field Notes

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Forsyth County Cooperative Extension News

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Compost Gives Plants a Healthy Boost

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Composted vegetable scraps and yard waste improves soil structure and nutrients for plants.

Happy New Year Forsyth County! 2022 has arrived and it is the perfect time to begin planning your spring garden! Plenty of gardeners are busy mapping out their garden and choosing seed varieties, but don't forget to give your soil a little extra care. The occasional warm day in January is perfect for preparing the soil in your garden bed, and what better way to build your soil than to add compost?

Composting has become popular in recent years for several reasons: It is an excellent way to reduce kitchen waste and when it is added to your soil it improves structure, boosts microorganism populations, and adds nutrients back into the soil.

According to the Environmental Protection Division, 12 percent of waste that goes into landfills in Georgia is organic material which could be composted. When these materials are thrown away, they fill the landfill faster and produce methane gas, a major greenhouse gas. Composting kitchen scraps along with yard waste reduces the negative impact on our landfills and produces a wonderful garden amendment.

Since compost is the result of plant decomposition, it contains nutrients like nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorous which are essential to plant health. Compost will release these nutrients slowly over time, which can be beneficial to maintaining long-term fertility in soil. Compost will also improve the structure of the soil for improved water infiltration and aeration, both of which benefit plant health.

Microorganisms are responsible for the decomposition process that breaks plant material down from complex molecules into smaller parts. These beneficial

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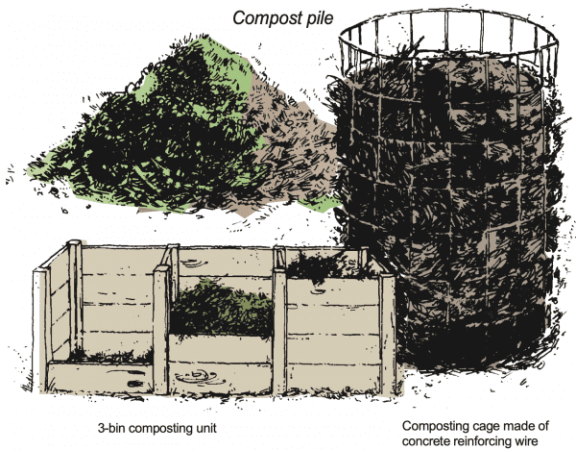
microorganisms remain in the mature compost, so adding compost to your garden improves the beneficial bioactivity of the soil. The microorganisms continue to break down fallen leaves and old mulch in your garden, thus releasing nutrients.

If you are looking to start a compost pile in your back yard, there are two methods you could use: cold composting or hot composting. Cold composting is the lowest input method, and it requires the least amount of attention. Simply pile up your compost materials as they become available and let the pile sit to decompose. This process works best if you do not create a lot of kitchen scraps, but it is a slow process taking many months to complete.

The other option is to build up a pile of compost 3 feet wide, 3 feet tall, and 3 feet deep. This pile will be large enough for the microorganisms to build up heat within the pile, which accelerates the decomposition process. The catch with this method is that you must tend the pile. It needs to be turned to make sure there is air throughout the pile, and it needs to be watered so the microbes don't dry up and die.



Compost bins can be very simple. Multiple bins help manage large amounts of material. Image: Alabama A&M Extension.

If you are interested in learning more about the how to compost, keep an eye on Forsyth County Extension's calendar. In April and May, we will be offering Georgia Green Landscape Stewards classes that will cover topics such as composting, native and invasive plants, water quality issues, and other sustainable landscape topics. Updates for our events are posted on our Facebook page and our website.

Winter Weed Identification and Control

By Heather N. Kolich
Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent
UGA Extension Forsyth County

Annual ryegrass is a common winter lawn weed.

We all know the adage that nature hates a void. Bare soil is one of those voids that nature will fill. To assist in this purpose, plants have adapted to survive and thrive in many difficult environments. When these plants show up in our lawns, pastures, and gardens, we call them weeds.

Types of weeds

Identification is the first step in controlling unwanted plants in cultivated spaces. We can narrow the options down with some simple classifications: season (summer or winter) and type (broadleaf or grass/grass-like). Let's look at some of the common winter weeds out there now.

Common broadleaf winter weeds

Chickweed (*Stellaria media*) is a mat-forming annual with small, white flowers at the ends of stems. It spreads outward from the center. When hand weeding, reach under the stems to the central point and pull up from there to remove the entire mat. For chemical control, products containing 2,4-D + MCPP + dicamba give good control and are safe to use in most turfgrasses.

Common chickweed Photo by H. N. Kolich

Carolina geranium (*Geranium carolinianum*) is a semi-erect annual weed with pink to purple flowers and deeply divided leaves at the ends of long petioles. This is also known as crane's-bill or stork's-bill because of the shape of the fruit capsule.

Carolina geranium Photo by H. N. Kolich

Henbit (*Lamium amplexicaule*) is a very common winter annual weed. It bears narrow, purple flowers on green or purple, 4-sided stems. Chemical control is the same as for chickweed.

Henbit Photo by H. N. Kolich

Musk thistle (*Carduus nutans*) is a winter annual or biennial with sharp spines at the tips of leaves and on flower bracts. For control, remove thistle with a shovel before it flowers.

Musk thistle Photo by S. A. Kolich

Common grass or grass-like winter weeds

Annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*) is probably the most recognizable winter grassy weed. Its round, bright-green clumps are quickly topped by light-green to white spikelets bearing small, white flowers. The flowers then produce seeds that fall into the lawn to ensure a new crop of annual bluegrass next winter. Control methods include frequent mowing to prevent seedhead formation, hand removal (ideally before seeds form), and spot spraying; however, the chemicals

most effective for controlling actively growing annual bluegrass can also injure several types of lawn turfgrasses. Emerged Poa annua growing in dormant bermudagrass can be spot-treated with glyphosate. See Annual Bluegrass Control in Residential Turfgrass for more information.

Annual bluegrass Photo by S. A. Kolich

Annual weed control

What these featured weeds have in common is that they are annual, as opposed to perennial, weeds. That's good news because annual weeds have only one means of reproduction: seeds. Frequent mowing to remove flowers and hand removal of the entire weed before it matures enough to be able to flower are effective for control of emerged weeds, with the important benefit of preventing these weeds from dropping seeds to germinate next year.

Unfortunately, previous crops of annual weeds may have built up a seed bank in the immediate growing area. Additionally, visiting birds and animals can drop weed seeds into our yards. These seeds can lie dormant, often for several years, just waiting for the environmental conditions they need to germinate.

That's where our second line of defense, pre-emergence herbicides, enter the field. They actually need to enter the field twice each year.

When to apply pre-emergent herbicide

A pre-emergent herbicide acts on plant seeds to halt the germination process. That's why it's important to apply the product to the lawn area before the season of growth begins. As noted earlier, we have two seasons for annual weeds: cool season and warm season. Cool season (winter) weeds grow from late fall to early spring, and warm season (summer) weeds grow from late spring to early fall. To reduce the germination success of weed seeds, established lawns need a pre-emergence herbicide application twice each year.

Because warm season weeds can begin germinating when soil temperatures reach 55˚ Fahrenheit, apply a pre-emergence herbicide in late-February to mid-March. To control winter weeds in North Georgia, apply a pre-emergent as early as late August but before the end of September. Pre-emergent herbicides continue working in the soil for several weeks. For some pre-emergence chemicals, a second application 8 to 10 weeks after the initial treatment is permissible.

Important to note!

Pre-emergence herbicides disrupt germination in all types of seeds. They should only be applied to established lawns. Additionally, certain herbicides – both pre-emergence and post-emergence products – can cause injury to some types of turfgrasses. For example, atrazine damages bermudagrass. Always read and follow the label directions when using pesticides. The Georgia Pest Management Handbook, Home and Garden Edition, is a good resource to find the appropriate herbicide to control specific weeds in different species of turfgrass, as well as information about pesticides used to control weeds, diseases, and insects in lawns, gardens, and homes.

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4-H Summer Camp Registration – Now Open!

By Heather Haines
4-H Agent
UGA Extension Forsyth County

A week of summer camp at one of Georgia's five unique 4-H centers is an adventure that kids remember and cherish for years, if not a lifetime. Every 4-H camp offers adventure, friendship, and fun, while seeking to develop the camper's Head, Heart, Hands and Health to nurture the whole person. Rock Eagle is the world's largest 4-H Center and provides campers with an array of workshops and hands-on experiences that make learning fun! Georgia 4-H is excited to offer a variety of camping experiences this summer for youth in 4th-12th grade.

Forsyth County's Cloverleaf Campers (4th-6th grade) will travel to Rock Eagle 4-H Center June 20-24, 2022. The cost for camp is $390. The price covers transportation on a Forsyth County School bus, lodging, meals, activities, and a camp t-shirt. Tentative activities during the week include swimming, canoeing, archery, a nature hike, herpetology, lake ecology, crafts, HOP (Health is Our Pledge) and outdoor recreation.

Junior Campers (7th and 8th grade) will have the opportunity to travel to Camp Jekyll on Jekyll Island this summer. Junior Camp will be held July 11-15, 2022. During the week, campers will have the opportunity to learn about all things marine life! Youth will also get to spend time with their friends on the beach, visit Summer Waves water park, take a boat tour, visit Tidelands Nature Center, play putt-putt, ride bicycles around the island, and more! The cost for Junior Camp is $400. Youth must be a current, active 4-H'ers in order to participate.

Additional camping opportunities include Wilderness Challenge Camp at Wahsega 4-H Center (6th-8th grade), Senior Camp at Rock Eagle 4-H Center (9th-12th grade), and Senior Extreme Camp at Frank Fitch Pioneer Camp on the Rock Eagle Campus (9th-12th grade). For all of these camping experiences, youth must be current, active 4-H'ers. To learn about how to become active in Forsyth County 4-H, email Ms. Heather at heather.haines@uga.edu.

Registration links will be posted on the Forsyth County Extension website. Scan the QR code below to go directly to the summer camp page!

Forsyth County 4-H is supported by The University of Georgia, Forsyth County Board of Commissioners, Forsyth County Board of Education, and United Way of Forsyth County. For more information on the 4-H Program, please call the Forsyth County Extension Office at 770-887-2418 or send an email to forsyth.extension@uga.edu.

4-H Summer Camp Registration QR code. Scan with your phone to go directly to the Forsyth County 4-H Summer Camp webpage to learn more about camp.

Upcoming Extension Programs

All About Trees Lunch & Learn Webinar series, noon-1 p.m. on the following dates:
Feb. 24: *Pruning and Pruning Safety*. Pruning is good for trees. Learn how trees and woody shrubs respond to different types of pruning cuts, when and how to prune for best tree health, and tips for avoiding injury when pruning.

March 3: *Trees for Bees*. Pollinators rely on flowering trees for food and habitat. Learn how your landscape can help sustain healthy pollinator populations.

March 10: *Abiotic Diseases of Trees*. Pests and pathogens aren't the only causes of tree diseases. Nutrient deficiencies, weather conditions, and human activities affect tree health, too. Learn what to look for to keep your trees healthy.

March 17: *Tree Selection for Urban/Suburban Landscapes*. Trees are great, but not every tree is suitable for the challenges of urban and suburban landscape environments. Learn what characteristics make some trees better choices than others.

Please visit https://extension.uga.edu/county-offices/forsyth.html for registration information.

Save the Dates

Georgia Green Landscape Stewards Program at Sharon Forks Library

Forsyth County is home to over 251,000 people and more than 87,000 housing units, each with some level of landscape. The lawn and garden management decisions we make individually have a huge collective impact on our environment. On Thursday evenings in April and May, Forsyth County Extension is partnering with Forsyth County Public Libraries to offer Georgia Green Landscape Stewards, a 5-session program introducing sustainable practices in 10 areas of landscape care. Save the date and register through FCPL at https://www.forsythpl.org/home.

Georgia Master Naturalist Training

If you love nature, you'll love being a Georgia Master Naturalist! Come train with UGA Extension this summer and learn about Georgia wildlife, native plants, forestry, water systems, geology, and more. Classes meet from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. on Fridays from June 10 through July 29, 2022. Course applications coming soon at https://extension.uga.edu/county-offices/forsyth.html.

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