Cooperative Extension Service | Horticulture

SCOTT COUNTY
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Growing Gardeners August

Cooperative Extension Service
Scott County
1130 Cincinnati Road
Georgetown, Kentucky 40324
Phone: 502 863 0984
sflynt@uky.edu
https://scott.ca.uky.edu/horticulture

Sharon P. Flynt
Agent for Horticulture

MAKE YOUR GARDEN THRIVE

The Five Benefits of Plant Diversity

A home garden filled with a variety of plants is not just beautiful—it's smart! Having different types of plants growing together can help gardeners enjoy fresh food much of the year, help manage pests, promote pollinators and even improve the soil. Let's explore why a diverse garden is a great idea.

Seasonal Harvests: Fresh Food for Much of the Year

One of the best reasons to plant a mix of vegetables, fruits and herbs is that different plants grow best in different seasons. Some plants, like lettuce and spinach, thrive in cool weather and can be harvested in spring and fall. Others, like tomatoes and peppers, love the heat and grow best in summer. By planting a variety of crops, gardeners can enjoy fresh food throughout the year instead of just one season.

Intercropping: Making the Most of Space

Intercropping involves planting different vegetables side by side to take advantage of the different times of maturity, heights, spread or rooting depths. A classic example of intercropping involves corn, beans and squash. A few weeks after sowing corn seeds, you plant pole beans close to the corn rows to use the corn stalks for support. The squash is a vining plant and will spread between the rows of corn and beans. As another example, you can set tomato transplants between lettuce plants; the lettuce matures and is harvested before the tomato plants grow very large.

Natural Disease and Pest Control: Creating Healthier Plants

A diverse garden can also help keep insect pests under control. When a garden has only one type of plant, insects that like that plant can quickly take over. But when there are many different plants, pests have a harder time finding their favorite food. Beneficial insects such as natural pest predators may be attracted to different plants in the garden.

Source: Rick Durham, University of Kentucky Department of Horticulture professor at the Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment
Related publication: ID-128: Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky

PLANT DIVERSITY ARTICLE CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE.

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Just like insects, plant diseases spread more easily when there is only one type of plant in a garden. If a disease attacks one plant, it can quickly spread to all the others of the same kind. However, in a diverse garden, diseases have a harder time spreading because different plants exhibit varying levels of resistance. This helps keep the garden healthy and productive.

Gardeners should also consider rearranging the placement of similar plants from year to year to prevent the buildup of insects and diseases in the soil.

More Pollinators: Helping Bees and Butterflies

A garden with a variety of flowers and vegetables attracts beneficial insects, such as bees and butterflies. These pollinators help plants produce fruit and seeds by spreading pollen from flower to flower. Without pollinators, many fruits and vegetables wouldn't grow well. By planting a mix of flowers and food plants, gardeners can support pollinators and enjoy bigger harvests.

Better Soil Health: Building Stronger Plants

Different plants use different nutrients from the soil. If a garden only has one type of plant, the soil can lose essential nutrients quickly. However, when a variety of plants grow together, they help balance the nutrients they take from the soil. Some plants, such as beans and peas, even replenish nitrogen in the soil, making it healthier for future crops.

A home garden with a variety of plants is stronger, healthier, and more productive. By planting a variety of crops, gardeners can enjoy fresh food for much of the year, naturally reduce pests, improve soil health, attract pollinators, and prevent diseases. Whether growing vegetables, herbs, or flowers, diversity makes a garden better in every way.

So, next time you plan your garden, consider adding a mix of plants—it's a simple way to help your garden thrive!

IN THE GARDEN THIS MONTH

By staying diligent now, your garden in central Kentucky will stay productive all summer and be well-positioned for a strong fall harvest and vibrant blooms next spring. Need help identifying USDA zone-specific varieties, planting dates around frost, or planning bed rotations? Let me know!

Watering / Mulch

Water deeply once/week, top up mulch

Weeding / Cleanup

Remove weeds weekly, clear dead foliage

Flowers & Herbs

Deadhead, prune, divide perennials, harvest herbs

Veggies & Fall Crops

Harvest often, side-dress, sow cool-season veggies

Seeds & Bulbs

Save seeds, order bulbs for fall planting

Lawn

Mow lawn high, delay fertilizing until FALL

Pest & Disease Control

Monitor regularly, clean debris, treat issues

Soil & Compost

Compost and feed soil, plant winter cover crops

YOUR LAWN - FALL is the best time to fertilize

Without question, the best time to fertilize cool-season lawns (Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue, perennial ryegrass, fine fescue) in Kentucky is during the autumn. These grasses all grow optimally during cooler weather and can best utilize nutrients at this time of year. The turf develops a better root system, becomes very dense, and has much better late fall and early spring color if nitrogen is applied in the fall. During mild winters, good color may be maintained all winter following a fall application of nitrogen. By eliminating or minimizing spring fertilization you: • Prevent the heavy flush of growth that occurs with spring fertilization. • Reduce frequency of mowing during spring. • Develop a better root system and promote better drought tolerance in summer. • Reduce disease. • Develop a more heat-tolerant, weedfree turf.

Cooperative Extension Service

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Lexington, KY 40506

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Pollinator-Friendly Perennials Blooming Now in Central Kentucky

And they are natives too!

As we head into August, central Kentucky gardens burst with color and activity as pollinators like bees and butterflies gather nectar. Planting late-summer blooming perennials not only enhances garden beauty but also supports these essential species. Here are some notable pollinator-friendly perennials currently blooming in the region, along with their ecological benefits.

Field Goldenrod - *Solidago nemoralis*

Goldenrod often gets a bad reputation for fall allergies, but it's actually a pollinator hero. This late-blooming native bursts with golden flowers, attracting bees, butterflies, and beneficial wasps during a time when few other plants are in bloom.

Benefit: Offers abundant nectar and pollen in late summer and fall, providing essential food for pollinators preparing for winter.

Aromatic Aster - *Symphyotrichum oblongifolium* is a beautiful perennial plant with many small, daisy-like flowers with purple-blue petals and yellow centers. Its compact, bushy form and prolific blooming make it an ideal choice for adding color and texture to garden beds and borders.

Benefit: The Symphyotrichum genus supports 100 butterfly/moth species as host plants and 33 pollen-specialist bee species.

Black-eyed Susan - *Rudbeckia hirta*

A cheerful and iconic wildflower, black-eyed Susan brightens up fields and garden beds alike. Its bold yellow petals surround a dark brown cone, and it blooms from mid-summer into early fall.

Benefit: Provides nectar for butterflies and bees and serves as a host plant for several butterfly species.
Add a little bit of body text

Hollow Joe-Pye Weed - Eutrochium fistulosum is a tall, herbaceous perennial characterized by its large, mauve-pink flower heads, which bloom in mid-to-late summer, attracting bees, butterflies, and other pollinators to the garden.

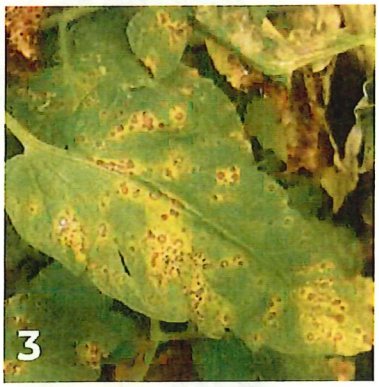
Benefit: The Eutrochium genus supports 40 butterfly/moth species as host plants.

RIGHT NOW-Common Tomato Troubles: Early Blight, Blossom End Rot, and Septoria Leaf Spot

Many people are bringing their sad-looking tomatoes into the extension office this month, wondering where they went wrong. However, tomatoes are prone to several common issues that can affect plant health and yield, especially with the weather conditions we have had this summer.

- **Early Blight** is a fungal disease caused by Alternaria solani, identified by dark brown spots with concentric rings on lower leaves. It spreads upward in wet, humid conditions and can cause plants to defoliate. Management includes crop rotation, mulching, pruning to promote airflow, and fungicide use if needed.

- **Blossom End Rot** is a physiological disorder—not a disease—caused by a calcium deficiency, often related to inconsistent watering practices. It appears as dark, sunken spots on the blossom end of fruit. To prevent it, maintain even moisture, avoid root damage, and don't over-fertilize with nitrogen. You might ask, Will adding calcium to the soil prevent blossom end rot? Not necessarily. Blossom end rot (BER) is caused by a lack of calcium in the developing fruit; it's rarely due to a true calcium deficiency in the soil. In most cases, the soil already contains enough calcium, but the plant can't take it up properly due to other factors, primarily inconsistent watering.



- **Septoria Leaf Spot** is another fungal disease marked by small, circular spots with tan centers and dark borders on lower leaves. It spreads rapidly in warm, wet weather and causes premature leaf drop. Remove infected leaves, avoid overhead watering, and use fungicides if needed.

Good garden hygiene, crop rotation, planting disease-resistant varieties, and proper watering practices are key to disease prevention.

1. *Early Blight – Visible as large, dark-brown leaf spots with distinct concentric rings (a "bull's-eye" pattern), often beginning on lower foliage. These lesions may also appear on stems or fruit. Photo: Purdue University Extension*

2. *Blossom End Rot – A physiological disorder where the blossom end of the tomato fruit develops a sunken, leathery lesion, typically dark brown or black, often mistaken for rot but caused by calcium-related stress. Photo: Cornell Extension Service*

3. *Septoria Leaf Spot – Small, circular lesions with tan or gray centers and dark brown margins; the presence of tiny black fungal fruiting bodies (pycnidia) in the centers helps confirm the diagnosis. Photo: University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service*

August 13, 2025
Beginner Backyard Ponds
Sarah Imbus, UK Horticulture Agent for Campbell County

August 20, 2025
There's Fungus Among Us!
Soil Health Through Fungal Partnerships
Sharon Flynt, UK Horticulture Agent for Scott County

August 27, 2025
Cover Crops in the Home Garden

Horticulture Webinar Wednesdays

University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment
Cooperative Extension Service

Register by clicking the link to the right or using the qr code

https://tinyurl.com/AUGHWW25

Summer Veggie & Wild Rice Bake

- **1** (6 ounce box) wild rice with herbs and seasoning
- **1 tablespoon** olive oil
- **1** medium eggplant, peeled and diced
- **2** yellow squash, cut lengthwise, sliced crosswise
- **1** green pepper, chopped
- **1** medium onion, chopped
- **6 cloves** garlic, minced
- **3-5** tomatoes, coarsely chopped
- **½ cup** coarsely chopped fresh basil
- **2 teaspoons** salt
- **1 teaspoon** pepper
- **1 cup** low fat shredded Italian cheese blend

Heat oven to 350 degrees F. **Prepare** wild rice in saucepan according to package directions. **Remove** from heat; **drain** excess water; **stir** in packet seasonings. **Heat** oil to medium high in large skillet. **Add** eggplant, squash, pepper and onion; **stir** and cook 5 minutes or until tender crisp. **Stir** in garlic and cook 1 minute. **Add** tomatoes, basil, salt and pepper; **stir** occasionally and **cook** 2 minutes until heated through. **Stir** in wild rice and spoon into a 9-by-13 inch baking dish that has been coated with cooking spray. **Top** with cheese and **cover** with aluminum foil. **Bake** 35 minutes or until bubbly. **Uncover** and **bake** an additional 5 minutes.

Yield: 16
Serving Size: ½ cup

Nutritional Analysis:
90 calories, 2.5 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 5 mg cholesterol, 469 mg sodium, 13 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 3 g sugars, 4 g protein.

While Farmers' Market or your garden are overflowing with vegetables at their peak freshness, consider making this delicious casserole that you can make for a summer family supper or any kind of party or cookout that August brings.

LET'S ROOT FOR EACH OTHER!