SELECTING AND USING FALL PUMPKINS

Selecting Pumpkins: High quality pumpkins are mature and firm, with a rich, orange color. To test for maturity, press with thumbnail—mature pumpkins will resist scratching. Avoid cracked, decayed or excessively scarred pumpkins. Select pumpkins according to how you will use them. If you plan to make a jack-o-lantern, a large, well-shaped pumpkin will best suit your needs. Use small, heavy pumpkins, sometimes marketed as pie pumpkins, for pies and other dishes because they contain more pulp than larger jack-o-lantern varieties.

Storing Pumpkins: Store whole, mature pumpkins several months in a dry, airy location—50°F to 55°F with a relative humidity of 60 percent to 75 percent. Handle pumpkins carefully to avoid surface damage, which leads to decay and shortens shelf life. Remove pumpkins showing any signs of spoilage from storage shelves quickly. For longer storage, freeze, can, or dry pumpkins for use in meals throughout the year.

Using and Preserving Pumpkins: Want your pumpkin to do double duty? Instead of carving a face in your Halloween pumpkin, use nontoxic paint or marker pens to create a unique face. After Halloween has passed, pierce small pumpkins several times with a sharp knife to prevent explosions and bake whole on a tray in an oven at 325°F until they pierce easily. Length of baking time depends on the size of the pumpkin. Halve larger pumpkins and bake on cookie sheets, cut side down. When cool, quarter pumpkins and peel off the outer skin. It should come off easily like the skin from a baked potato. If not, bake a little longer. Scoop out the seeds and stringy membrane. Keep the seeds for roasting. Mash or puree the pumpkin pulp and freeze in amounts needed for your favorite pumpkin recipes. Roasted pumpkin seeds make a terrific high energy snack. To roast: wash off strings and blot seeds dry. Toss with a small amount of vegetable oil, spread in a single layer on a shallow baking sheet and bake at 250°F for 10 minutes to 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Salt, if desired, cool and store. Short on time? Use your microwave oven to bake pumpkin and roast the seeds. See individual manufacturer’s directions. You can also cook pumpkins in boiling water, steam or in a pressure cooker; however, baking usually yields more pulp.

Preservation Facts:
Although pumpkins will keep on the shelf for several months if stored properly, you will need to use other preservation methods for longer storage: Freezing is the easiest way to preserve extra pumpkin, and it yields the

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best quality product. An added advantage—you can freeze pumpkin puree in the amounts needed for your favorite recipes. Thaw in the refrigerator, and you’re ready to make Thanksgiving pie from your Halloween pumpkin! If you don’t have room in your freezer, cut cooked pumpkin into cubes, pack into canning jars, cover with boiling liquid and can in a pressure canner. Because of pumpkin’s low acidity, pressure canning is a must! The disadvantage to canning is that you must drain and puree pumpkin before using it in most recipes. It is not safe to can mashed or pureed pumpkin. The mixture is so thick that no safe processing time has been established.

The quality of dried pumpkin is fair to good. Keep storage conditions dry and cold for longest shelf life. Freezer storage is ideal. You can grind dried pumpkin into “flour” in a blender and add small amounts to baked goods for more flavor and nutrition. If rehydrated, you can puree dried pumpkin in a blender and use for pies or baby food.

Source: MissouriFamilies.org

MissouriFamilies is produced by the College of Human Environmental Sciences, Extension Division, University of Missouri-Columbia.

Learn more about canning and freezing your fresh fruits and vegetables on our Webpage at: http://extension.missouri.edu/publications/DisplayPub.aspx?P=gh1451

ASIAN LADY BEETLES
By: Mary Kroening

It is that time of year again when the Asian lady beetles will start looking for a nice warm location to hold up for the winter. I receive many calls regarding hundreds of these in people’s homes, and the fact that they’re beneficial seems to be irrelevant. The Asian lady beetle was introduced into the United States in the late 1970’s as a predator. They are beneficial because both the immature larval and adult stages feed on aphids, mealybugs, scales, and other soft-bodied insects. Adults can live up to three years. However, as winter approaches the adults seek out protection and cluster at these locations to hibernate. Asian lady beetles over-winter in cliffs in their native habitat, thus seek out vertical surfaces such as the walls of homes that are light colored and have a south or southwest exposure. The beetles then enter homes through window screens and doors, cracks in the walls, or vents. They then congregate in undisturbed areas of the home such as attics and spaces within walls until the temperatures become warmer and days longer in March and April. At this time the beetles then move outside to search for food and become the most active in the house.

Asian lady beetles do not feed on wood, clothing or human food, and they do not reproduce indoors during the winter. However, many homeowners can get irritated due to the large numbers than can be present in the home. The use of a vacuum cleaner is the best method of collecting the beetles. They can also be swept up in a dustpan and relocated outside in a sheltered spot a good distance from the home. If you use a vacuum for the beetles, it is recommended that you change the bag soon afterward as the beetles will die and leave a permanent odor in the vacuum bag. The beetles are extremely beneficial as predators on other insects, thus emptying the vacuum cleaner bag outdoors allows the insect to live. It is important to try to prevent the beetles from getting into the home by sealing outside cracks around doors, windows and siding. Window screens should fit snugly and not have any tears or holes and screening should be installed over attic and exhaust vents.


LADY LANDOWNER WORKSHOP

The Adair County Soil and Water Conservation District would like to invite women landowners to join us for our annual Lady Landowner Workshop on Wednesday, October 13th from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. We recognize that the number of women owning and helping in the management of land in Northeast Missouri is a growing number and we hope that this workshop is especially helpful. Our speakers are looking forward to coming and presenting interesting and enlightening programs. Among the topics being discussed are: “A Historical Look at Water Quality in America”, “Controlling Invasives on the Farm” and “Landowner Liability for Livestock”. There will also be a fun personality game called “True Colors” that will show how we can all effectively relate to others based on our personality type. There is no cost to attend and we ask that you please RSVP by 3 p.m. on Thursday, October 7th by calling 660-665-3274 Ext. 3. We look forward to seeing you there!

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IT’S PERSIMMON PICKING TIME!

Most of you know I am from south-central Missouri, and this time of year I love it down in the Ozarks. The trees are turning color and it is persimmon picking time. I probably won’t make it home to my parents farm to pick persimmons this year, but I do have a good supply in my freezer from last year’s picking. Last year I took my son, whom at the time was two years old, and we along with my mom, went out to the persimmon grove on the farm to pick persimmons.

If you have picked persimmons before, you know that they must be ripe. Unripe persimmons are loaded with tannin, which causes the puckering and distaste. The ripe mushy persimmons are very sweet. The pulp can contain as much as 34 percent fruit sugar. The ripe fruit, almost rotten looking, is so soft it seems to melt all over your hand when you pick it up. Persimmons are high in pectin so they can be used in puddings without adding thickeners and sweeteners.

Wildlife such as opossums, raccoons, deer, rabbits, and squirrels love to eat persimmons. Even the cows like to eat them too, and we often have to watch where we step, so not to step in a cow patty. Folklore from the Ozark Mountains says the persimmon seeds carry a prediction for the winter weather. Each fruit has one to six flat brown seeds. The story is that if you cut a seed in half, you will see either a knife, spoon or a fork shape. The “knife” shape “forecasts an icy cold winter with winds strong enough to slice through a person.” A “spoon” shape forecasts “plenty of snow to shovel.” A “fork” shape forecast a “mild winter.”

I have been in Northeast Missouri nine years, and I have yet to find or hear about a grove of persimmon trees in the area. I know of one tree on Illinois Street in Kirksville, and I have heard about people having a tree or two on their farm around here, but not like the groves of them that grow in the shallow, rocky, Ozark soils. I want to share my favorite persimmon cookie recipe. It’s a recipe that’s been past down in my family, and I bake persimmon cookies for my three year-old son, who loves them.

Persimmon cookies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredients</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 cup persimmon (I like a little more than that)</td>
<td>1 egg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cup raisins</td>
<td>½ cup butter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cup nuts (optional)</td>
<td>1 tsp soda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cup sugar</td>
<td>½ tsp cinnamon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 cups flour</td>
<td>½ tsp nutmeg, ½ tsp cloves</td>
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Cream sugar and butter. Add nuts and raisins. Beat eggs, add persimmon and soda, then mix with sugar mixture. Add dry ingredients and mix well. Drop by spoonfuls on greased cookie sheet. Bake approximately 10 minutes at 350 degrees.

SEVENTY-FIVE ATTEND LOCAL FRUIT TOUR

Seventy-five people attended the local fruit tour held September 15, 2010. The rain held off and it turned out to be a nice day. The day started with a stop at Lost Branch Blueberry Farm where Robert Price discussed his u-pick blueberry operation. Then it was off to Jacob’s Vineyard and Winery where Russell and Sheila Pruett discussed their operation and gave a tour of their winery. They also gave samples of wine to those who were interested in doing some wine tasting. We had lunch at the Truman State Farm, where farm manager Bill Kuntz, discussed the vineyard project there. The Truman farm grows both table and wine grapes. The grapes are used to make juice, and in the near future they would like to grow enough table grapes to supply the dorm cafeterias. An ag-business specialist and I received a $1000 grant to partner with Truman State and work specifically on a grape project. This year, new vines were planted, a spray schedule was more closely followed, and netting was used to keep birds out of the grapes. The last stop of the day was to the West Orchard, owned by Dan and Mary West, just north of Macon. They grow 17 varieties of apples, along with some peach, apricot and plum trees. Some people enjoyed picking their own apples that day. I picked some ‘Liberty’ apples and have an apple recipe to share that is quick, easy and even my three-old son loves.

Apple-Cheese Biscuits: 1 can of biscuits, 1 large or two medium apples sliced into pieces, shredded cheese, cinnamon and sugar. Flatten biscuits on a cookie sheet and cover each with apple slices. Spread shredded cheese evenly over each one. Sprinkle with cinnamon and sugar. Bake at 375 degrees for 10 minutes.
GARDENING TIPS FOR OCTOBER

ORNAMENTALS
• Plant spring bulb flowers.
• Continue watering, especially evergreens if soils are dry.
• Container grown and balled & burlapped trees and shrubs can be planted. Loosen the soil in an area 5 times the diameter of the root ball before planting. Mulch well after watering.
• For best bloom this winter, Christmas Cactus, potted azaleas, and kal-anchoe may be left outdoors until night temperatures drop to about 40 degrees.
• Cannas and dahlias can be dug when frost nips their foliage. Allow plants to dry in an airy, frost-free place before storage.
• Spring bulbs for forcing can be potted up now and stored in a cool, frost-free place until it is time to bring indoors, usually for 12-15 weeks.
• Transplant deciduous trees after they have dropped their leaves.

FRUIT
• Persimmons start to ripen, especially after frost.
• Monitor fruit plantings for mouse activity and take steps for their own control if present.
• Place wire guards around trunks of young fruit trees for protection against mice and rabbits.

VEGETABLES
• Continue harvesting tender crops before frost.
• Harvest winter squash and pumpkins before frost.
• Dig sweet potatoes before a hard freeze.
• Gourds should be harvested
• Sow cover crops such as winter rye after crops are harvested.

TURFGRASS
• Seeding should be finished by October 15.
• Broadleaf herbicides can be applied now to control cool season weeds such as chickweed and dandelion.
• Continue mowing lawns until growth stops.
• Keep leaves raked off grass to prevent smothering grass.
• Now is a good time to apply lime if soil tests indicate the need.
• Winterize lawn mowers before storage.

MISCELLANEOUS
• Week 1 - Fall color begins
• Week 3 - Begin peak fall color in maples, hickories, and oaks.
• Week 4 - End of peak fall color.

 UPCOMING EVENTS

 October 4:  Fabius Master Gardener club meeting, 6:30 pm in Kahoka.
 October 5:  Salt River Master Gardener meeting, 7 pm. Palmyra Sesquicentennial Bldg; Rhonda Adair (Artist, Ursa Il) "Ghoulish Gourds: Gourds as Art and Fine Craft." Bring a friend night!
 October 5:  Heartland Master Gardener meeting; 7 p.m., Area Career Center, Brookfield; program-native plants.
 October 9:  Sandhill Farm Sorghum Festival, 1-4 pm, Rutledge, MO. Join us for garden & greenhouse tours, hay wagon ride to sorghum fields, sorghum pressing and cooking, and sorghum treats! 2.5 miles west of Rutledge off Hwy M - look for the Sorghum sign by a gravel road.
 October 12:  Magic City Master Gardener meeting, 6:30 pm; Randolph County Extension Office; harvest dinner.
 October 12:  Sullivan County Master Gardener meeting.
 October 19:  Kirksville Area Master Gardeners meeting;
 October 25:  Macon-Shelby Master Gardener meeting,

Schuyler and Putnam counties will be having their Lady Landowner Workshop on Wednesday, October 27. For more information about this workshop contact the Schuyler County Extension Office at 660-457-3469.