

GARDEN CHATTER

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Laclede County Master Gardeners

186 N. Adams Ave. Lebanon
Ph. 532-7126

President
Dixie Krisher

Dixdon1@yahoo.com

Vice President

Peggy Graydon

pgraydon@centurylink.net

417-588-2483

Secretary
Barbara Thompson
417-533-8148

Treasurer
Glennie Kinnett
giggardening@gmail.com
417-588-0198

Newsletter Editor
Robert "Bob" Smith III, 417-532-5783
onevol90@gmail.com

Master Gardeners of Laclede County
186-D N. Adams Ave.
Lebanon, Missouri 65536
Phone: 417-532-7126 •
Fax: 417-532-4587

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Our New President

Dixie Krisher



Wilson's Receive Emeritus Status

Marvin & Jennie Wilson are shown with Bob Smith (l) and Glennie Kinnett(r) for their pin presentation.

Clyde's Slide developed By One of our Own!

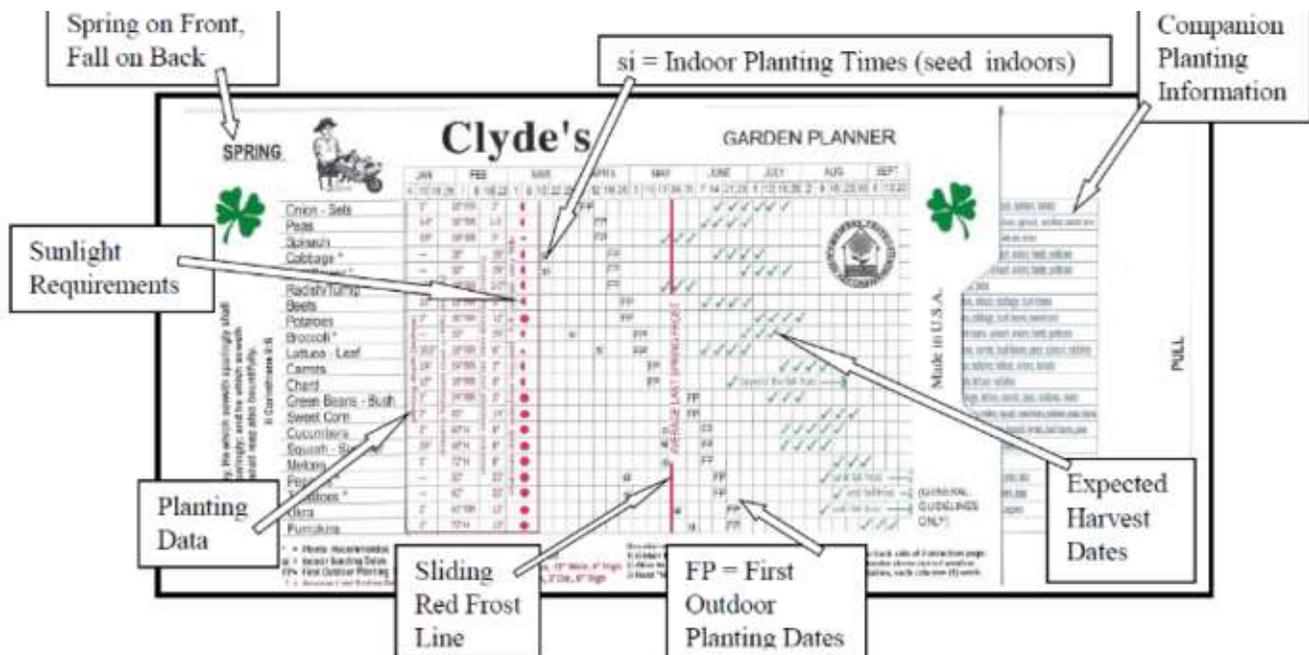
Clyde Majerus is one of our members of the Laclede County Master Gardeners – The following is the story of how he came to develop this Gardner Planner (which I take the editors' privilege of referring to as "Clyde's Slide). He describes his planner in his own words along with other gardening plants and gardening tips. Clyde we are proud of you.

Now here is Clyde's story!

How Clyde's Garden Planner was conceived

This slide chart was conceived in the early 1990's while I was attempting to plan the sequence of events in our 50ft x 120ft garden, near Centralia Missouri. I was feverishly interested in gardening. My goal was to orchestrate garden-work around the upcoming birth of our third daughter, baby Esther. The baby was due mid-June. I wanted to plant beans so as to be available to help my wife, Ann, in the hospital delivery, without having any worry about the garden going to waste.

During that period, I was studying "time phasing" as part of my Industrial Engineering day-job. Many manufacturing companies use a time-phased plan for raw materials and parts requirements, in order to insure on-time delivery of the final product. The planning system is known as MRP, (Material Requirements Planning). For example; without a time phased plan, it would be impossible for John Deere to bring all the 20,000 parts of a combine together for shipment on time. MRP involves using a **horizontal calendar** and planning backward from the customer's expected delivery date.



Beginning with a time-phased horizontal calendar, (ie; Jan, Feb, Mar...), I scribed a line for the average frost date, and a 2nd line for the expected baby's birth. Next, the various garden

vegetables were listed, first to last, in order, as they are planted relative to the frost date. I counted weeks from the frost to first planting date. That is when the slide chart idea came. Looking at my personal garden plan, I realized that if the frost line could be made to slide, the chart would be useful as a tool for gardeners throughout the country. See diagram below....(It works from Florida to Canada, and from the East to the West Coast!)

The baby and the beans both came in the same week that year, beans are predictable, babies are not...(Smile). I obtained a copyright for the chart, had a batch of charts printed, and we went into business. However, the chart was not well received, and folks did not understand its value. We were a busy home-schooling family, with minimal marketing know-how, and formidable time constraints. I took a new job and we moved, so the chart project sat idle for about (9) years. Then a friend suggested we begin offering them on the internet. It worked! (Thanks for the encouragement DAB!)

Since 1999 when we began offering Clyde's Garden Planner on the internet, we have sold over 260,000 charts. We sell to individuals who are looking for an easy method to identify local frost & planting dates. Many charts are also purchased by Garden Stores, Vegetable Seed Catalogs, Master Gardeners, and Hardware Stores; customized with their name in the header and used as a promo or premium. My wife and (6) homeschooled children all participate in the business. We had (5) computers. Each child has business responsibilities, from folding charts, to taking and filling internet orders. (Note: Kids are all grown and out of the house now-days...)

I consider the chart idea a gift from God to our family, and to those who use it as a helpful tool for gardening. We thank Him for it! This simple invention has provided some of the extra funds needed to raise the kids and has greatly expanded our mental horizons. Many folks we will never meet have helped us greatly with the business effort, and with internet promotion. We have learned to design, produce, fold, pack, ship, handle customer concerns, advertise on the net, and promote the business, from the home. The project has helped us trust the Lord for assistance as we move forward expanding the business each spring. Recently it has become a significant element in our retirement.

Clyde's Garden Planner can be customized and used as a Promotional Item / Teaching Tool for almost any gardening related organization. Your Organization's Logo and Contact Information, such as street address, web address, phone number, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter etc..... can be printed on the chart, (Bulk Price for 100 is \$210, B&W). Each time the chart is used, it reminds folks of your group. This handy chart is much less likely to be discarded as compared to newspaper ads, a customized pen or yearly calendar! Many Garden Centers, Hardware Stores and even Master Gardener groups contact us for Customized Charts each year.

Clyde's Garden Planner for iOS

Finally, the popular Clyde's Garden Planner is Updated and Available on your Apple Mobile Device! Just follow this link:

[GO TO CLYDE'S IOS GARDEN PLANNER](#)

With Clyde's Garden Planner for iOS all your vegetable planting activities are displayed in a "Time-Phased" format relative to your local frost dates. Plus, many new features,



such as Sunlight Requirements and Companion Planting just recently added to the App!

Having Problems with Clyde's iOS?.....[Contact Support](#)
.... clydeschart@gmail.com

RAPID FIRE GARDEN TIPS

Spring will be upon us before we know it. Below are a few RAPID-FIRE GARDEN TIPS from Clyde as you get ready for the growing season. Some of these ideas are in the sketch which we hand out at garden shows....see below.

- Get your garden tools and related items in advance, Gloves, Knee-Pads, Rake, Hoe, Hoses and Nozzles, Shovel, Hand Shovel, Seeder, Seed Starting Flats, Potting Soil, Fertilizer, Weasel Tool, Wheelborow and others....Buy them "Off-Season" at a lower cost.
- Pick a level spot for the garden, one which gets full sun. If not level, choose a spot which declines to the south for best sun exposure.
- Turn sod green side down by hand with a shovel, then grind up dirt with a tiller or Weasel which is a great tool to grind up soil manually.
- Make your rows run north to south to take best advantage of the arc of the sun with minimal shading.
- Use Weed Blocking plastic to minimize weed take-over. Preventing weeds is easier than pulling them.
- Rake soil into 8-10" high raised rows 18" wide. This allows for more intense planting & keeps seeds from rotting due to excessive water during those toad-stranglers. We also form dirt dams in between hilled-rows so that rain is captured in the garden, but not on top of the seeds or sprouts.
- Use a yellow twine to help get your rows straight. Tie the Twine to (2) wooden stakes then stretch across garden when preparing the row or when planting.
- We use orange construction flags to mark planting locations, so young plants don't get stepped on.
- Purchase a drip-tape irrigation system. Drip tape is great!!!! It uses 50-70% less water, and keeps you from watering the weeds. Drip tape is extra helpful if you live in an area where drought is frequently a summer reality...can find online. Good drip tape will come with a check-valve to maintain steady pressure in your lines. **I really like the garden irrigation kit provided by Irrigation Mart**....Here is a link to the garden kits their web site: <http://www.irrigation-mart.com/products/KITS.aspx>
-
- Pole beans require an Upright Lattice, but generate (2.5) times more beans. Pick pole beans early to avoid strings. We make our pole bean lattice out of cattle panels and t-posts – works great....see sketch below. Run lattice north to south to avoid shading other crops. We like Blue Lake Stringless pole beans.

- Get a soil test from Lowe's or another hardware store, and test your dirt to see if it needs any nutrients. Cost = \$5.00 roughly. Fertilize as needed. Your local state extension office can also help you with soil tests. They provide an excellent analysis of the garden bed, along with a recipe for improving the soil...by amending....see sketch below. NPK and Acidity are important, but don't overlook the Cation Exchange numbers. They tell you how well the soil holds the fertilizers you add....see sketch below. Adding organic matter increases the Cation numbers.
- Use straw or some other similar biological materials to mulch around plants and between rows. It slows the weeds, and helps hold in the water during dry season. Then it breaks down into fertilizer.
- Learn how to compost. Composting turns your kitchen scraps into excellent fertilizer.
- Put aged (1 year or older) horse manure on your garden....work it into the soil...makes your garden explode with growth.
- If you decide to do starts from seeds in the house, be sure to keep them moist, every day. They can dry out and die very quickly. I have had great results with Miracle Grow plant starter potting soil.
- Cover seed flats with clear kitchen stretch wrap at first to help them germinate, then remove soon after germination.
- If you do starts in the house put a fan near-by seed flats so that your little seedlings do not die from damping-off, a moisture related problem.
- Try using a shop vacuum to suck up squash beetles if they attack your zucchini or yellow squash. Catch them in the morning while they are grouped up. Don't plant all your squash in the same area of the garden...make it hard for the parent bugs to find plants. Watch for and remove squash eggs from the plants. They are normally in small shiny brown groupings on the leaves.
- Make and preserve your own Salsa....Onions, Green Peppers, Hot Peppers, Tomatoes, Garlic; all healthy and easy to grow. Walmart has Salsa Seasoning Packets, or let me know if you would you like our sweet salsa recipe.
- Teach your kids as you garden....it is a excellent way to spend a quantity of quality time with them! We had (6) kids and I spent lots of time with them in the garden when they were little.
- We like the Tomato Hoop idea...see below. It gives more support to the branches.

Clyde's No-Name Flaming Hot Pepper Tree!

Last year, while at a Baker Creek heritage seed festival, I purchased a pepper start which turned out to be a beautiful blazing hot pepper tree! It came as a smallish plant, but the vendor told me that it was necessary to cut his very large full grown plant down with a chain saw. He also said that the plant was absolutely full of bright red peppers. Wish I could remember the name he told

me! So, we planted our little pepper in a large pot, kept it alive in the house over the winter, and moved it to the deck this spring, watering twice a day in the oppressive summer heat. Just take a look at the blog photos....

The thing has grown into a small tree – a pepper tree, leaves, bark, red hot peppers and all!! The striking red fruit turns upward toward the sun. We have picked lots of them, and it just keeps on blooming, making more! Sure wish I knew what kind of pepper it is..... Are



they hot? They are waaaaay above our tolerance level on the heat scale. We will use them sparingly in Mom's chili and in homemade salsa. She served them this week with rice, not bad. I cut a couple of the hot peppers open and found between 30 & 50 seeds per pod. We counted over 200 pods on our plant....which equates to more than 8,000 seeds per plant. I suspect this one gets an A+ on the "be fruitful and multiply" commandment! If you know what kind of pepper this is, please let me know. Also, if you want to try planting the seeds, I am thinking to sell a few...hope it is a HOT market.

Clyde

Addendum: I believe we have identified the pepper tree as a Chile de árbol! This is an equatorial pepper with heat range from 15,000 to 30,000 Scoville Units. To learn more see the Wikipedia article: [Chile de árbol](#)

Clyde's Reasons For A Vegetable Garden!

Let me sell you on Vegetable Gardening. Below are some of the reasons my family and I grow a vegetable garden each year.

Vegetable gardening is outdoors. **It gets you out of the house**, away from the TV, Computer, Phone, etc. You will hear the birds, see wildlife, take in some sun, put your hands in the dirt, watch things grow, and even have an occasional visit with a neighbor over the fence.

Vegetable gardening is **productive exercise**. With gardening you get that heart rate up while expending physical energy on something that generates food.

Vegetable gardening **keeps you home with the family**. Fishing, Golf, Softball, and other out-of-the-home activities tend to divide the family. Everyone goes their own way. Gardening as a family **IS** togetherness – especially when the kids are small i.e. 3 to 9 years old. I had a blast in the garden with our six children during this era of family's life. Also, working in the family garden was/is an element in our home-schooling efforts. Many Biblical lessons are understood through agriculture/gardening.

Vegetable gardening is a **financial net-gain activity**. Many other activities drain dollars from the family but not so of vegetable gardening. Gardens require initial investment, then give a payback, and even a profit. Our gardens have done this for years. Some years selling the extra vegetables paid for the garden, while we canned for winter, and consumed all summer long.

Vegetable gardening **gives healthy food**. It has become clear that eating fresh fruit and vegetables is a critical preventive measure for health problems. Chemicals in the food chain have also become suspects in the cancer mystery. Eating vegetables from your own garden, grown without toxins, sounds healthy to me! Not to mention that you cannot do better than the taste of a fresh home-grown tomato.

Vegetable gardening is FUN . If you like to get outside, enjoy meaningful exercise, want to stay home with your family, savor a profit-making project, and want to eat healthy/tasty... gardening is for you!



LOOKING BACK 50+ YEARS AGO



Gardening by Month - January

Monthly Tips and Tasks

Category	Week				Activity
	1	2	3	4	
Houseplants	x	x	x	x	To clean heavily encrusted clay pots, scrub them with a steel wool pad after they have soaked overnight in a solution consisting of one gallon water to which one cup of white vinegar has been added. After the deposits are removed rinse the pots in clear water. A brief soak in a solution of one gallon of water to which one cup household bleach has been added will help sanitize the pots.
	x	x	x	x	Some plants are sensitive to the fluorine and chlorine in tap water. Water containers should stand overnight to allow these gases to dissipate before using on plants.
	x	x	x	x	Wash the dust off of houseplant leaves on a regular basis. This allows the leaves to gather light more efficiently and will result in better growth.
	x	x	x	x	Set the pots of humidity-loving houseplants on trays filled with pebbles and water. Pots should sit on the pebbles, not in the water.
	x	x	x	x	Allow tap water to warm to room temperature before using on houseplants.
	x	x	x	x	Fluffy, white mealy bugs on houseplants are easily killed by touching them with a cotton swab soaked in rubbing alcohol.
	x	x	x	x	Insecticidal soap sprays can be safely applied to most houseplants for the control of many insect pests.
	x	x			Quarantine new gift plants to be sure they do not harbor any insect pests.
		x	x	x	Amaryllis aftercare: Remove spent flower after blooming. Set the plant in a bright sunny window to allow the leaves to fully develop. Keep the soil evenly moist, not soggy. Fertilize occasionally with a general purpose houseplant formulation.
Ornamentals	x	x	x	x	Gently brush off heavy snows from tree and shrub branches.
	x	x	x	x	Limbs damaged by ice or snow should be pruned off promptly to prevent bark from tearing.
	x	x	x	x	Check stored summer bulbs such as dahlias, cannas and gladioli to be sure they are not rotting or drying out.
	x	x	x	x	To reduce injury, allow ice to melt naturally from plants. Attempting to remove ice may damage plants further.

Category	Week				Activity
	x	x	x	x	Use sand, bird seed, sawdust or vermiculite to gain traction on icy paths. Avoid salt or ice melters as these may injure plants.
	x	x	x	x	Make an inventory of the plants in your home landscape. Note their location and past performance. Plan changes on paper now.
		x	x	x	Sow pansy seeds indoors now.
Miscellaneous	x	x	x	x	Avoid foot traffic on frozen lawns as this may injure turf grasses.
	x	x	x	x	Make a resolution to keep records of your garden this year.
	x	x	x	x	Store wood ashes in sealed, fireproof containers. Apply a dusting around lilacs, baby's breath, asters, lilies and roses in spring. Do not apply to acid-loving plants. Excess ashes may be composted.
	x	x	x	x	Check all fruit trees for evidence of rodent injury to bark. Use baits or traps where necessary.
	x	x	x	x	Cakes of suet hung in trees will attract insect-hunting woodpeckers to your garden.
	x	x	x	x	Brightly colored paints applied to the handles of tools will make them easier to locate in the garden.
	x	x			Seed and nursery catalogs arrive. While reviewing garden catalogs, look for plants with improved insect, disease and drought-tolerance.
	x	x			Old Christmas trees can be recycled outdoors as a feeding station for birds. String garlands of peanuts, popcorn, cranberries, fruits and suet through their boughs.
	x				Christmas tree boughs can be used to mulch garden perennials.
	x				If you didn't get your bulbs planted before the ground froze, plant them immediately in individual peat pots and place the pots in flats. Set them outside where it is cold and bury the bulbs under thick blankets of leaves. Transplant them into the garden any time weather permits.
		x	x	x	Try sprouting a test sample of left over seeds before ordering new seeds for spring. (Roll up 10 seeds in a damp paper towel. Keep moist and warm. Check for germination in a week. If fewer than half sprout, order fresh seed.)
				x	Swap seeds and plant information with your gardening friends.

January Pest and Problems

Continue to inspect indoor plants closely for insect pests such as aphids, spider mites, scale, and whitefly.

Caring for Indoor Plants this Winter



Unless you are lucky enough to live in one of the warmer climates in Florida, Louisiana, Texas, or California, then you have probably already had to bring in some of your plants for the winter.

Caring for Indoor Plants this Winter

However, just bringing them inside during the cold-weather months is not enough. In fact, during the winter, you have to change up your whole [indoor plant care](#) routine for those plants that live indoors all year as well. It is not just about the cold weather but the lack of sun, chilly air drafts, and the dry heat from running your heater. First of all, let's talk about what plants you need to bring indoors in the first place.



What Do I Need to Bring Indoors?

Some of the plants that grow great outdoors most of the year have to [come inside](#) when the temperatures start to get close to freezing. Some of the most common include the Begonia, Fuchsia, Geranium, Flowering Maple, Caladium, Crepe Myrtle, Boxwood, Coleus, and the Hibiscus. Of course, you also need to bring in herbs such as rosemary, lemongrass, chives, parsley, basil, and hot peppers.



Too Much of a Good Thing is a Bad Thing

While many people think that most plants die from not enough water, it is usually just the opposite. People tend to [overwater](#) their indoor plants just because they see them more often than their outdoor plants. But most plants are happier with a bit of a drier root than a soaked root. In fact, some plants like to go completely dry before getting watered again. To test the moisture, reach down about two inches from the top rather than just feeling the top of the dirt. The best thing to do is to find out how much each individual plant needs to be watered and stick with it. Water them on a certain day every time so you will not forget and stick to the schedule no matter what. If you are worried that your heater may be drying them out too much, put a humidifier nearby.

It's Time for a Diet

Even though it may sound harsh, your houseplants need to go on a diet during the winter. Check with Google to be sure, but most indoor plants do not need [any fertilizer](#) during the winter months. In fact, feeding them during this time of year can make them sick so just give them sun and water during the colder months of the year. Don't worry, they will not mind the diet.



Keep Them Warm

Keeping your plants away from cold drafts is important as well. Just as if you were sitting by a drafty door or window, your plants get uncomfortable when being repeatedly subjected to cold drafts. In fact, being too close to a cold draft all the time can kill some plants. Most indoor plants like to be at about 60 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit although some may like it a little cooler. Check the individual plant for the temperature that they like best and then try to keep them at that temperature. You can use a thermometer to determine the temperature of the space your plant is in and to determine if there are any drafts, just stand there for a few minutes and you will find out. And don't forget about the sun.

Let There Be Light

You have to remember that there is less sunlight during the winter and it is coming from different areas of the house, so you need to pay attention to which places are sunny and at what time of the day. First, figure out exactly how much sunlight each individual plant needs to be healthiest. Of course, it may say full sun or partial sun on the tag, but it is best to do some research. Google it and find out which of your plants like a lot of sun and which ones do not. And, don't forget that sunlight increases the temperature for the plant so keep that in mind when determining the temperature for each plant. Also, wipe the leaves with a soft, damp cloth if they get dusty so they can absorb more light.





Watch for Diseases

Another reason for wiping the leaves to keep them clean is that dust can cause disease or pest infiltration. Some [diseases to watch out for](#) include:

--Root Rot

Watch for yellow or wilted leaves as well as a sour smell. If you are keeping your plants too wet, root rot can waterlog the soil and suffocate the roots, which will die.

--Gray Mold

This fungal disease, which is also called Botrytis, can attack the whole plant. What you need to look for is fuzzy gray mold growing anywhere on the plant.

--Powdery Mildew

If you see white powder on the leaves of your plant, it may have this disease. It may not kill your plant, but it will weaken it so something else can attack and kill it.

--Leaf Spot

This disease causes black, brown, yellow, or water spots on the leaves. When it gets worse, the spots will connect and kill the leaves. It can also cause dust on the flowers and other leaves.

--Viruses

Any kind of virus in your plant can cause streaks, mottled, or distorted leaves as well as stunting the plant's growth. Most of these viruses are not curable and contagious so if your plant has a virus, get rid of it.



Pest Control

You may think that your plants are safe from bugs when you bring them indoors. But, no, you also have to worry about indoor houseplants when it comes to [pest control](#). In fact, they are more susceptible because these pests can multiply quickly because there are no natural predators indoors. Here are some of the pests to look out for:

--Whitefly

These bugs look like tiny white moths and fly around the leaves

when the plant is moved. They can cause your plant to turn yellow and die.

--Scale

These nasty little buggers are tiny insects with a hard shell that suck the nutrients from the plant leaves and stems. You will see small dots under the leaves and stems if your plant is infiltrated.

--Mealybug

The mealybug is easy to see because it is larger than most pests. They look like cotton and collect underneath of the plant's leaves.

--Spider Mites

These tiny bugs are hard to see but they look like tiny dots under the leaf by the stem. The leaves will look faded and you may see some webbing.

--Aphid

This pest is commonly seen in plants and they are either white, black, yellow, or green. The leaves will look distorted and weak if your plant is infested with aphids.

Keep Them Healthy

To keep your indoor plants healthy until spring, you just have to follow these simple tips and do not overwater or feed. Keep an eye out for [pests](#) or infections and make sure they get the amount of sun and heat they need. Hopefully, they will make it until spring and you can move them back outdoors.

Sustainable Turkey Day: Feed Your Garden the Holiday Leftovers



Your garden will give thanks for all your scraps!

Most people don't think about all the waste leftover after a delicious feast with family or friends. Truthfully, though, much of what you have leftover **ends up in a landfill**, where it doesn't do your garden any favors! This year, make a holiday for your garden too by **returning as many nutrients** as you can back to the Earth and reducing food waste. Make it a new tradition to teach any young folks in your Thanksgiving gathering about how they can participate.

While one great way to **incorporate your garden** into holidays is to take canned or frozen veggies and fruits out for the meal, it's also great to look ahead to next year's garden, and the nutrients it will need.

Have a Plan

While it can be a daunting task to dive headlong into the labors of sorting waste, learning about decomposition, and how to **find the best compost bin**, this holiday feast is the perfect opportunity to experiment with being more conscious about waste.

Something as simple as hanging a couple of different trash bags during your meal prep or while you're clearing dishes can make the most off-putting **chores of compost** much more palatable. Most people detest the idea of rooting around garbage to pull a banana peel away from spoiled milk and who knows what else, but having a designated bag for meats and other items that rot and spoil, which won't be ideal for adding nutrients to your garden, and another trash bin for vegetables and organic materials makes it a snap. It can even make cleanup seem like a game for children or family members who want to help out in the kitchen.

Veggie Scraps to the Compost Heap



Many folks divide the items they compost in a heap or in a compost barrel into "green" materials and "brown" materials. When you are done with your Thanksgiving feast, you have a lot of leftovers in the green category, even though they aren't all technically green: the husks from corn on the cob, the cobs themselves, stems and seeds removed from veggies, and fruit peels. Rather than having your team of Thanksgiving preparers throw all of this away, set a single bowl for adding all the scraps, and designate one person to take these veggies out to the compost heap. Alternatively, a lot of those odds and ends can be used to **make great soup stocks** or even a hearty broth if you save any parts of your turkey carcass.

Choose Compostable Paper Products and Tear Them Up



Perhaps one of the most easily overlooked waste items are all the paper goods in your kitchen. While many of these items are recyclable you'd be surprised how many paperboard products head straight for the landfill that don't need to. If you make sure that you use napkins, plates, and even compostable disposable silverware at your big

gatherings this Turkey Day, you can add them as part of the "brown" material in your compost heap. This cuts out steps like garbage trucks, recycling centers, and paper mills, and gives directly back to the Earth via your thriving yard.

They take longer to decompose if they don't have a lot of surface area exposed, so set as many people as possible to the task of shredding these items finely. Kids will have fun carefully making confetti of the old paper products, and your compost heap will have plenty of the wet and dry materials that make it function so well!



Evaluate Those Leftovers for Garden Chickens and Other Animals

Did the corn get passed on this season because those candied yams were so delicious? Did the rolls, so delicious, turn stale and crusty the next day? Leftover grain and bread can be great for your **garden's chickens or other**

animals you raise if your garden incorporates livestock. While most meat and processed foods don't help much in the garden, many of the Thanksgiving staples are actually great for turning into "new animals" by feeding your garden's livestock.

More Ideas for Your Thanksgiving Leftovers in the Garden

Save eggshells, full of many valuable nutrients, for your compost heap.

When you have plastic jugs and plastic clamshells, figure out how you can turn them into watering jugs or new planters. Small jars and irregular containers can also be repurposed for keeping **small hand tools** together in your garden shed or for **seed storage**. No reason to buy new plastic planters when your food containers will do!

When you boil veggies, save the water until it is at room temperature and then use it to water your winter crops; they get the nutrients that have boiled off your veggies.

If you do some indoor gardening, you can save ugly bits of potato or other veggies that will grow back from just a piece of the root. Have your Thanksgiving guests who are fairly little participate in planting them and putting them by the windowsill to get sunlight.

Are **you a seed saver**? If you get organic, heirloom produce to serve your guests, pull those seeds out and let them dry for use in your garden next spring. They may not be as consistent as seeds from a packet have been for you, but you'll never know until you try to grow!

Make Black Friday the Day to Turn Your Compost!

Know what's cheaper than the **cheapest Black Friday deal**? Entirely free, rich, wonderful compost! Once your compost heap has gotten a big influx of new material, make sure you take some time to mix it all in, where the brown material and the green material can interact and the bacteria can break down everything into soil. By Spring, you'll be glad that you gave thanks and saved some things from the trash. Long-term, composting is not only very sustainable and helpful for your garden, it also saves you a lot of effort and money in buying commercially produced compost in plastic bags and hauling it from the garden center to your garden.



With these strategies, your garden can be just feel just as stuffed as your table full of guests by the end of the holiday. It also doesn't hurt to get out and about in the garden a bit, walk off some of that sleep-inducing tryptophan from the turkey, and be grateful for the many homegrown goodies that will arrive with the next year's harvest.

How to Grow the Christmas Rose, *Helleborus niger*



Growing the Christmas rose, *Helleborus niger* is a great way to have a little history in your garden and have a great winter-blooming perennial at the same time.

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Gardeners often despair when the snow flies because they have to wait until spring for flowers, however hellebores are winter-blooming perennials that laugh in the face of winter snows. *Helleborus niger* (or black hellebore) can satisfy the need for something in bloom and growing this perennial cures the blues in an otherwise dreary gardening season. The species name, *niger* means black and the description refers to the color of the hellebore's roots, which are dark or black in color.

Hellebore History

Native to Central Asia and the Balkans, the hellebore has a long and interesting history. There are a number of species, however *H. niger* is reputedly the one that blooms the earliest. Known as the Christmas rose, even though it is in no way related to actual roses, it was the first flower to bloom after the Winter Solstice. Legend has it that the tears of a young girl who had no gift for the Christ Child dropped upon the snow and the angels transformed her tears into the hellebore. Early

Christians associated the flower with innocence and believed that it had the power to ward off evil spirits because of this. When the Gregorian calendar replaced the Julian calendar in 1582, the superstitious people of the British Isles refused to adopt it because hellebores no longer bloomed on Christmas Day, which was January 6th. The Gregorian calendar pushed the date back to December 25th, nearly 2 weeks earlier. It was 1751 before they adopted the new calendar.

The Romans spread the hellebore throughout their empire and while we use it for decorative



purposes now, it was an important part of their herbal pharmacy. Roman physicians often prescribed hellebore to treat insanity, epilepsy and drive out demons from the possessed. Magicians also used powdered hellebore to curse farmlands, which was apparently a popular medieval practice among rival farmers. It was also an ingredient in an invisibility potion that supposedly allowed the user to walk about the countryside unseen. Hellebore also contains *cardiac glycosides* which is similar to the chemical make up of Digitalis and was used as a heart medication in the elderly. The powdered root was also compounded into snuff, since it is an irritant

that would cause sneezing.

Grow Christmas Rose in Your Own Garden

Growing hellebore today is a great way to add to a [cottage garden](#) with an early-blooming plant and while it has some specific needs, once established, hellebores are easy plants that take care of themselves. Plant hellebores in an area where they receive dappled shade and protection from the wind. They like plenty of moisture and slightly alkaline, well-drained soil. They do not do well in boggy conditions. If your soil is too acid, add some lime. Choose their location carefully because hellebores have a long tap root and are difficult to transplant once established. The nodding flowers look best when planted on a hillside or in a raised area, however, they are quite attractive under shrubbery and along a tree line as well. Christmas roses will multiply and naturalize well in these conditions, although odd seedlings may appear. *Helleborus niger* has a white or pale pink flower, although seedlings with more pink or even greenish sepals are not uncommon. I choose to let the diversity be an asset instead of a hindrance and the occasional green flower is simply extra. Seeds sprout best when they are fresh and not allowed to dry. They also need 3 to 6 weeks of freezing temperatures to

properly germinate and take about 3 years to reach maturity. These perennials are evergreen with glossy leaves and grow between 12 and 15 inches tall. Hellebores are hardy in USDA Zones 4 through 8 and should be spaced about a foot apart to allow for spread. Pair them with [early blooming spring bulbs](#) like [snowdrops](#), [crocus](#), [daffodils](#) and shrubs like [flowering quince](#). In the warmer parts of its growing region, the Christmas rose will probably bloom near Christmas Day, in the colder areas of its range, it could be as much as a month or so later.

Other Hellebore Species

There are other species of Hellebores that will add diversity to your garden and [Helleborus orientalis](#) is the most common. This species blooms a bit later than the Christmas rose and with their addition you can keep hellebores in bloom in your garden until late spring. They come in numerous



colors and even doubles. [Helleborus foetidus](#) is another hellebore that is a popular garden plant, however its species name gives us a hint as to why it shouldn't be planted at eye level. The specific descriptor *foetidus* means stinking and if sniffed closely, the fragrance does remind one of a skunk. Don't let that dissuade you though, planted in the garden, the scent is hardly noticeable. Their garden requirements are the same, so if the Christmas rose is happy, the others will be as well. Once they are established, they are tough little plants that multiply and reseed with lovely variations. Pair the later blooming species with tulips, narcissus and lilacs.

The Christmas rose and its relatives are a wonderful [addition to a perennial garden](#) that needs some winter interest. Their early blooms reaffirm the truth that spring will come again. Hellebores bloom during the darkest days of the year and brighten up the season. There are a number of [vendors that offer the plants by mail order](#) and they will be more than happy to ship them as soon as the weather warms a bit. Plant hellebores this spring for their cheerful blooms next winter.

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Forcing Bulbs to Cure the Winter Blues



"Forcing" is such a hard word for the easy practice of bringing bulbs to bloom indoors out of season.

Almost any bulb can be brought to bloom indoors through the simple process of "forcing."

Convincing flowers to bloom indoors out of season may seem like it requires brute force, but really it's mostly a matter of timing. Understanding what bulbs need to bloom and providing those conditions is actually fairly simple. Amaryllis and paperwhites are holiday traditions, but almost any bulb can be brought to bloom indoors. Now is the time to start forcing paperwhites for Christmas and amaryllis can be bought just as they are about to bloom, right up to the holiday. But I enjoy indoor blossoms far more in the post-holiday gloom of January and February than when they have to compete with the glitter of holiday lights. To brighten midwinter days, consider starting a second round of these two flowers right before the holidays, or try a slower flower and introduce some variety into your winter centerpieces.

Amaryllis

Amaryllis is a popular winter flower because it is as easy as it is beautiful. Their huge red flowers are almost synonymous with Christmas, but amaryllis cultivars have white, pink, and even candy-striped flowers that evoke spring more than Santa. While the common name amaryllis continues to be used, the flower is properly classified as belonging to the genus *Hippeastrum*, and is native to the tropics of South America. This means that unlike most spring-flowering bulbs, which need a period of cold to bloom, amaryllis' cycle of growth and dormancy is controlled by soil moisture. Amaryllis bloom after

six to eight weeks of growth, and are usually sold when they are ready to bloom. Amaryllis do best when kept warm and in bright light until the flower buds begin to show color.

Many types of bulbs are spent after forcing, but amaryllis can be coaxed to bloom repeatedly by replicating their native moisture cycle. Cut the finished blooms and treat the amaryllis like a sun-loving houseplant until it is warm enough to plant outside. Keep the plant outdoors in full sun all summer. Before the first frost, bring it inside and store it in a dark place. Allow the pot to dry out completely for about two months. Then repot your bulb, begin watering it again, and bring it into sunlight for a new round of blossoms. The more sunlight and heat you give your amaryllis, the faster you will get flowers. If you want to delay blooming until later in the winter, wait a bit longer to start watering, and grow your amaryllis in a cooler room with fewer hours of bright light.

Paperwhites

If you're looking for a subtler blossom than the bold amaryllis or if you're craving fragrance, paperwhites are just as easy as amaryllis. Paperwhites are a subspecies of *Narcissus tazetta*, and unlike other *Narcissus*, they don't require chilling before they bloom. In fact, paperwhites don't even need soil. Forcing them is really as simple as setting the bulbs into a base of pebbles or glass marbles and adding water. Keep the water level just above the bottom of the bulbs. Paperwhites will appreciate all the light they can get, but if the room is too warm, they will grow tall and floppy. They will bloom in about three weeks.

Paperwhites can be brought to bloom again, but it takes two to three years. Once the flowers are done, pot the bulbs in soil and treat them like a regular houseplant. Cut the leaves after they are completely brown. Once all the leaves are gone, stop watering the pot to initiate dormancy. Repot the bulbs and begin watering again in the fall. Eventually you will get flowers again. If this is too much work, you can also plant the bulbs outside and forget about them. They might surprise you.

Other Spring Bulbs

Tulips, daffodils, crocuses, bluebells, grape hyacinth, lily of the valley, and snowdrops can all be forced indoors, following roughly the same procedure. Each flower has its own chilling requirement, with different optimum temperatures and durations. Chilling can often be achieved by storing the bulbs in a paper bag in an unheated garage in colder climates, but a refrigerator is required if you live somewhere warm or are trying for later blooms extending into summer. When shoots first emerge after cold storage in the dark, most bulbs benefit a week or two in dim light and cool temperatures before being placed on display in the house.

* *Lily of the Valley* – They seem so delicate, most people are surprised that lily of the valley are so easy to grow indoors. No chilling is needed; simply soak the pips in warm water until they swell. Then pot them like houseplants and you'll have flowers in about three weeks.

* *Grape Hyacinth* – Grape hyacinth require at least ten weeks of cold storage. Once they sprout, they will grow quickly, with long-lasting blossoms often arriving in under three weeks. Once spent, bulbs can be planted outside, where they will eventually take over your entire yard.

* *Daffodils* – Most daffodils require 13 weeks of chilling. Longer cold storage will result in taller flowers. Once brought into the house, cooler temperatures and direct sunlight will produce the best results. Daffodils will flower in three to four weeks.

* *Tulips* – The size of tulip bulbs can affect how long they need to chill, as can the time when you start to force the bulb. Large bulbs started in October may take up to 16 weeks of chilling while a smaller bulb started in December may only need eight weeks. Once they sprout, warm daytime temperatures will speed growth while cool nights will help flowers last longer. Allow about three weeks for flowers to bloom once bulbs break dormancy.

* *Crocuses* – Crocus corms are best chilled in moist soil for about 12 weeks. The plants will grow best with bright, indirect light and cool temperatures that drop even lower at night. Crocuses cannot be brought to bloom indoors twice, but may bloom again eventually if planted outdoors.

* *Snowdrops* – These ephemeral flowers are for the truly dedicated. Up to 15 weeks of chilling is required before you can briefly enjoy their blossoms indoors. Plan on growing snowdrops near a drafty window, as the optimal temperature for growth is 60 degrees, only slightly warmer than the 45-50 degrees needed for chilling. Snowdrops will bloom about three weeks after they begin growing.

Hyacinth

Hyacinth has a reputation for being as difficult to force as amaryllis is easy. But these fragrant, old-fashioned flowers are so worth the effort, which isn't really as great as it's made out to be. Two factors contribute to hyacinth's diva-like reputation. First, they require a longer cold period than many other flowers. Eight weeks is the minimum, but some varieties may need as long as 16 weeks. The second factor is that hyacinths are not stored dry during their rooting period. Traditionally, hyacinths have been suspended over water in special vases (or you can try the toothpick method commonly used to sprout avocados) in a cool, dark place for the 8 to 16 weeks that it takes for the roots to fill the vase. Occasional water changes are required. When the vase is filled and the leaves are only a couple of inches tall, hyacinths can be brought into the house. Early spring bloomers, hyacinths do well in cool, dim spaces, so those who live in old houses in Northern climates can rejoice.

If weeks of checking water levels in the garage seems impossibly daunting, remember the traditional way is not always the best way. Refrigerators are generally considered too cold to root hyacinths successfully, but many people have had success forcing their hyacinths with the same techniques they use for other bulbs (see above). The varieties 'Lady Derby' and 'Gipsy Queen' are reputed to be particularly promising for this easy method.

Forcing Bulbs for the Windowsill



Growing flowering bulbs indoors provides some color anytime during the year.

Though spring is a few weeks away, parts of the country are still within winter's grasp. Gardeners can look at this time with glass half full or empty eyes. Though seed and plant catalogs help to endure this pre-season period, I also find that getting things to grow alleviates the gardener's itch of planting outdoors too soon. Besides getting some starts underway, I'm referring to forcing bulbs indoors. 'Forcing' sounds like

garden bullying, but really it is just imposing artificial conditions upon various bulbs that do well indoors to provide some winter or indoor color inside the home. Which bulbs to use and how to force them? Fortunately, the selection is pretty varied and the process is easy with a little advanced planning.

To start with, there are two main types of bulbs – those that require chilling and ones that don't. The ones that don't need an extended cool period to initiate blooming are generally native to warmer climates. Amaryllis and paper whites are two of the most commonly grown indoor blooming bulbs. Although most folks think of the red Amaryllis given as a Christmas gift, there are unique varieties that produce red, white, pink or peach colored blossoms and different looking flowers. These bulbs take about 6-8 weeks after planting before they bloom.

Bulbs that need a longer cooling period may take between 12-16 weeks. One factor here is where the potted bulbs will be stored, so space and keeping the soil moist are two considerations. Because of that, I'd choose the bulbs that don't require cooling.

Paperwhites, a type of narcissus, are often planted together so that the cluster forms a bouquet of flowers. These take about 3-5 weeks after planting to bloom; plus they may be planted with other bulbs to produce an extended flowering period. Paper whites started around Thanksgiving should be blooming by Christmas.

Bulbs that require a chilling period include tulips, crocus, daffodils and hyacinths. Some varieties of these types do better with the forcing process than others, so be aware of the varieties you are planting. The large-flowered varieties of crocus do well, as do the majority of hyacinths. Tulips and daffodils are a little pickier, but there are plenty of types that should satisfy any gardener. For tulips, the Apricot Beauty, Blue Eyes, White Dream, Salmon Pearl and many of the Emperor colors are recommended. For daffodils, consider

Once the selection of bulbs is completed, select a container in which to grow the bulbs. The container needs to hold water and may be a glass vase, champagne flute, metal container or sealed flower pot or anything else that strikes your fancy. Obviously, a champagne flute will hold one bulb, but a larger container may house many.

Most containers will need some type of substrate in the bottom. This can be small rocks, pea gravel, beach glass, sand, glass rocks or a soil layer depending upon whether the bulbs will be transplanted outdoors or allowed to go dormant in the pots.

Bulbs that sit in a glass might not need any pea gravel layer as the narrow neck keeps the bulb from sitting in water.

Once you've added the material to your container, place the bulbs on top of the layer with the tip pointing upwards. Don't laugh, sometimes folks place the bulbs upside down in the container and can't figure out why their bulbs aren't growing. Fill the container with water to the point that the bottom of the bulbs are slightly in the water. As the bulb sprouts, the roots will grow into the water. If the stems are growing too quickly and are tending to droop, mix rubbing alcohol and water in a 1:10 parts ratio and use this mix to replace the existing water in the container to slow the growth.

Placing the wetted containers in a refrigerator or any cool location that stays between 35 and 50°F for several weeks will simulate a winter condition. When the containers are removed and placed in a sunny window, the hyacinth or paper white bulbs are fooled to "think" spring and start to grow.

Amaryllis bulbs will go into a soil mixture or one that has equal parts potting soil, sphagnum peat moss and perlite. These containers will need a drainage hole, and since the bulbs have enough stored energy to sprout and flower, they don't need fertilizing. Place the bulb so that any roots are in the soil and keep at least 1/3 of the bulb above the soil. Water thoroughly, then maybe once a week until the leaves start to sprout. Increase the watering at this point to several times a week.

Of course, other plantings with the bulbs may enhance their beauty and add a different look than just a bulb in a pot. Don't press the bulbs deep into the soil; they like some loose soil. Determining when to start bulbs depends upon your anticipated flowering date, then counting backwards depending upon the type of bulb to be started. Of course, starting the bulbs anytime during the year also works. This keeps a parade of indoor blooms marching through the year, even when the gardening season outside is good.

Recipe of the Month

Hoppin' John: A Southern New Year's Tradition



Southern tradition says eating black-eyed peas and rice with collard greens on New Year's Day will bring health and prosperity in the New Year. The collards represent paper money and the black-eyed peas represent coins.

What is Hoppin' John? This blend of rice and black-eyed peas with collard greens is the traditional New Year's Day meal in the South. The tradition has spread to other parts of the country as well. The original ingredients for Hoppin' John consist of a pound of bacon, a pint of peas, and a pint of rice. The earliest known appearance of a print recipe for the dish is found in Sarah Rutledge's 1847 cookbook, *The Carolina Housewife*. One of the most consistent directions in early recipes is the explicit instruction to cook everything together in the same pot. Early Hoppin' John recipes called for red peas or cow peas which gave the dish a characteristic purplish color and indicated the Hoppin' John had been made with a true variety of old-fashioned peas. The most widely accepted explanation for the name indicates that Hoppin' John is a corruption of a French phrase, *pois à pigeon* (pigeon peas). In October 1907, the Quality Shop in Charleston announced in the *Charleston News and Courier* that they had just received the season's first shipment of cowpeas in preparation for New Year's.



It's unclear when black-eyed peas began to be used in the recipe. Historically, people have used the terms cowpeas, field peas, and black-eyed peas interchangeably. Technically speaking, they are not peas but rather beans belonging to the species *Vigna unguiculata*. They're often called

crowder peas because of the way the beans crowd together in the pod. Like their paler cousins, red cowpeas have a black eye in the center and are sometimes referred to as red black-eyed peas.

Although decidedly African in origin, Hoppin' John's is included in cookbooks like Sarah Rutledge's *The Carolina Housewife*. The daughter of Governor Edward Rutledge, signer of the Declaration of Independence and member of Charleston's elite planter society, Rutledge writes that even prior to the Civil War, the dish was eaten in the Lowcountry of South Carolina by both African American and white residents of all classes. By the turn of the 20th century, it had become a prominent feature on Charleston New Year's menus. The meal for President William Howard Taft's visit to the city in November 1909 consisted of a dinner of rice pilau, okra soup, and Hoppin' John.

Black-eyed pea farming began to spread more widely than that of other varieties of the cowpea. They were eaten throughout the entire South by all classes, but were looked down on as a poor-folks food. Black-eyed peas were slow to catch on in the north where for most of the 20th century, the navy bean was preferred. The exception was among African-Americans who had arrived during the Great Migration, a relocation of more than 6 million African Americans from the rural South to cities in the North, Midwest and West. Former Southerners substituted black-eye peas for the traditional red peas in Hoppin' John because red pea varieties weren't available outside of the Carolinas.



Eating Hoppin' John on New Year's Day was the established tradition, and Southerners kept it going even when the original ingredients were not available. During the mid-20th century, Hoppin' John began to be introduced to the rest of the country when recipes for the dish were published in dozens of cookbooks and hundreds of newspapers across the nation. Until the 1960's, most recipes outside of Charleston spelled Hoppin' John as Hopping John and called for black-eyed peas instead of red cowpeas. This may have been due to practicality since cow peas were well known in the South but not easily obtained in the rest of the country.

Later recipes specified that the rice and peas should be cooked separately and combined at the end. This was probably easier for cooks who were not familiar with the Carolina way of cooking rice. It also meant that the rice was not permeated with the savory flavor of the bacon broth. As a result, 20th century recipes began to add other ingredients to boost flavor. During the depression, Hoppin' John was frequently promoted by the federal government as well as by numerous home economists because it kept families well-fed for little cost. Cheap and plentiful rice and beans were a natural choice.



Since then, cooks have taken numerous measures to try to impart a little flavor to Hoppin' John recipes. Some of today's most popular recipes have become fairly elaborate. [Emeril Legasse's version](#) includes a ham hock along with sautéed onions, celery, green peppers, garlic, and the peas cooked in chicken stock with bay leaves and thyme. Ree Drummond, *The Pioneer Woman*, uses 12 ingredients in her recipe. Several decades ago, a group of food lovers noticed that an important food legacy was being lost and initiated a movement to revive the use of heirloom vegetables and grains as well as heritage animal breeds and the preservation of traditional methods and recipes.

I come from a long line of Southern cooks. The recipe below is from Marion Flexner's *Out of Kentucky Kitchens* (1944), a cookbook I inherited from my mother. However you make your Hoppin' John, you're carrying on a long Southern tradition that's steeped in history and folklore.

HOPPIN' JOHN (Rice and Peas)
(An old Carolina recipe)
(6 servings)

½ lb. bacon or salt pork
1 C black-eye peas
1 slice hot red pepper

1 qt. water (or more if needed)
1 C uncooked rice
Salt and black pepper to taste

Wash bacon or salt pork. Put in a Dutch oven or heavy metal pot with a tight-fitting lid. Put all ingredients in pot except salt—the meat is so salty that this seasoning is added later. Cover the pot and let come to a boil, then reduce heat and let peas simmer until tender—this takes about 1½ hours or longer. Add salt to taste. Add rice and cook until it too is tender—about 30 minutes. If liquid evaporates add more from time to time. Put rice and peas in a serving dish and place the bacon on top of them. If dried peas are used, soak overnight before cooking.

Just a bit late for New Year Day but it is great any time. – Here is to a great 2019

Protecting Woody Plants from Vole Damage

With snow on the ground and less abundant natural vegetation, voles begin feeding on the bark near the soil surface and roots of trees and shrubs. Voles, also known as meadow mice, cause serious damage to young apple trees, especially those on dwarfing rootstocks. Voles also feed on other fruit trees, blueberries, and some ornamentals, but usually do not feed on grapes, blackberries or raspberries. Although much of the feeding damage occurs during the winter months when voles girdle trunks of woody plants, it often goes unnoticed until drought stress occurs during the following growing season and the injured trees become weak or die.



Figure 1 A meadow vole, commonly found in or near tall vegetation in northern Mo.

Voles are not true mice, but are small gray or brown mammals that have plump bodies with short legs and tails about an inch long. Three species of voles are found in Missouri. Adult pine voles (*Microtus pinetorum*) are three to five inches-long and are found in fields in and around wooded areas. These voles inhabit extensive underground tunnels, spending little time aboveground. Adult meadow voles (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*), which tend to be larger than pine voles, are about four to seven inches-long (**Figure 1**). They are found in grassy or

weedy areas in northern Missouri, especially where the vegetation is not mowed. Prairie voles (*Microtus ochrogaster*) are the most common species found in Missouri and are about the same size as meadow voles.

As their common name implies, pine voles are found in sites with dense vegetation.

Voles reproduce quickly, resulting in cyclical increases in their populations. Female voles start reproducing 35 to 40 days after birth, with multiple litters every 21 days. Breeding peaks in the fall and the spring. Meadow and prairie

Although hawks, owls, foxes, and snakes feed on voles, tall vegetation beneath low tree limbs, brush piles, and leaves provide voles with protection from these predators. Vole colonies are also protected in their network of underground runways with several openings at the soil surface. Meadow and prairie vole runways often have small clippings in them.

To reduce the incidence of voles, do not use mulch around the base of fruit trees as it provides an excellent habitat. Hardware cloth (no larger than 0.25 inch mesh), about eighteen inches tall, with at least three inches underground, can be placed around the base of the trunk to protect it from vole damage. Vinyl tree guards can also prevent girdling when placed on trunks in the fall, but should be removed once growth begins in the spring as they can harbor insect pests during the growing season. Keep grass and weeds short by mowing, rake leaves as they accumulate, and eliminate brush. In orchards, remove limbs immediately after pruning.

For small populations of voles, mouse snap traps baited with a slice of apple or peanut butter and oatmeal can be used. Also, stake the trap down as voles can sometimes drag them away. With some excavation, traps can be placed end-to-end or perpendicular inside runs. Repellents are also available, but often these products wash away with precipitation and do not provide long-term vole control. Rodenticides in landscapes must be used with extreme care, out of reach of children, pets, domestic animals, and non-target wildlife, or in tamper-proof bait stations. Also, bait stations should be secured to prevent spillage from these units.

For commercial orchards, rodenticides are not applied until after all fruit is harvested in the fall. Also, some products may only be purchased and applied by licensed applicators. Multiple products and control strategies are needed to reduce vole populations in commercial plantings. These recommendations can be found in the Midwest Fruit Pest Management.