

The Thymes

APRIL 2025

With the gusts of April
Rich fruit-tree blossoms fall,
On the hedged-in orchard-green,
From the southern wall.
Apple-trees and pear-trees
Shed petals white or pink,
Plum-trees and peach-trees;
While sharp showers sink and sink.

- Christina Georgina Rosetti, from "A Year's Windfalls" 1866 -

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT, Margo Carroll

Happy Spring Master
Gardeners,

April is an exciting and busy month for gardening enthusiasts! As the days grow warmer and spring blooms in full force, we have a variety of events and activities to enjoy. Our educational Classes in the Garden are in full swing, offering opportunities to expand your knowledge and skills, please invite friends and neighbors to one of these educational classes. One of our biggest events of the year, the **Flower, Lawn & Garden Festival**, will take place on **April 25 & 26**, bringing together vendors, workshop and class presenters, and gardening experts to celebrate all things green and growing.

I encourage all members to get involved by volunteering for some of

these events. Whether you assist with set-up, help answer gardening questions, or lend a hand at one of our information booths, your support is invaluable to the success of these programs. Volunteering is a great way to connect with fellow gardeners, share your expertise, and contribute to our community's love for gardening.

Looking ahead to May, we have two special events to mark on your calendar. On **May 6**, we will celebrate the graduation of our Intern Class and recognize the dedication of our members at the **Hour Awards Meeting**. This gathering will be held at 1:00 in the indoor classroom at the Plateau Discovery Gardens and will be a wonderful opportunity to honor the hard work and achievements of our volunteers. We look forward to seeing you at

these events and sharing another wonderful season of gardening together!



Happy Gardening,

Margo



Gardener's To-Do List for April

From the *Gardening Almanac for The Plateau*, created by the CCMG association in memory of Betty Bush/2017. Copies are available for \$10.00 at the UT Extension office and the Plateau Garden office. Also from *Southern Living* magazine, circa 1990's.

- **Perennials** – You can divide crowded plants now. Use a fork or spade to dig around the plant, then lift it out of the ground. Most clumps will just pull apart, but you may need to use a knife on others. Slice crowns into pieces, making sure there are new shoots and a clump of roots with each division. Plant at the depth they were originally growing, and water frequently until well established.
- **Hummingbirds** – The hummingbirds are ready to arrive, so prepare their solution (1 part sugar to 4 parts water). No need to boil, just stir thoroughly. The red on the feeder is all they need to find it, so please don't add food coloring – it's hard for the hummingbirds to digest and has been linked to kidney failure and death.
- **Prune** – Prune summer-flowering shrubs (like crepe myrtle) after the last extremely cold weather, but before they leaf out significantly. Prune spring-flowering shrubs like forsythia, Japanese quince, and lilac within two to three weeks after the last petals have dropped. Prune these shrubs at the base (no more than a third of the oldest growth) near the ground to keep their flowering heavy.
- **Bulbs and Tubers** – Plant tender bulbs and tubers (gladiolas, lilies and dahlias). Additional plantings of gladiola - every two weeks until mid-June - will ensure a continuous source of blooms.
- **Build a Worm Farm** – Have you ever considered creating a worm farm? Any kind of box 1 foot tall by 1 to 2 feet wide will do. Drill holes in the top, sides, and bottom to provide air circulation and drainage. Look for red worm in a manure pile or under leaves in the woods, or you can buy red wigglers. The worms need good bedding of dampened torn or shredded paper, newspaper, cardboard, brown leaves, straw, peat moss, sawdust and hay. They will eventually eat their bedding, since they eat half their weight in food every day, so start with a cup of food every other day. This food can be scraps of vegetation, nut not any dairy, fats or meat. These worms will process about 3 pounds of garbage per week, providing you with worm fertilizer you can harvest every 2 or 3 months.



Remember to send your items of interest before the end of this month to Jan Pitzer at jprp1990@gmail.com

Without your valuable input, this newsletter can't deliver the spirit of our vibrant membership.

Leaf Patrol

By Sue Partch

The Thymes article on To-Do List for March made me smile.... grimace? MY to-do list for warm enough days in February and March has mostly “to-do” with finding my lawn. Days spent at home working outside - not at PDG in the daylilies - involve picking up sticks , ditching my driveway and raking up leaves. By the time I’m done with that, things are already so far up and green I’m trying to keep up with mowing and weeding.

Our property has lots of trees. Every spring everything from small twigs to large branches litter the yard. Even with using a wagon for fewer trips to the brush pile I’ve yet to find any way other than repeatedly walk a few steps then bend over to get the bigger pieces. The next day my back and legs remind me how out of shape I’ve gotten. This year is worse than usual due to the several storms with strong winds we had. I’ve done stick duty 3 times so far.

Our driveway has a slant that means when we have heavy rains the water can overflow the drainage ditch and make washout gullies in the gravel. This is even more likely if the ditch is clogged with winter debris. I learned this our first couple years here along with the fact that it’s easier and cheaper to clean out the ditch early in the spring than to repair the washouts. So now during our earliest warmish days you’ll find me with rake and tarp pulling leaves and sticks out of the ditch onto the tarp then dragging the tarp off to dump it in the woods.

I tend to avoid raking leaves in the fall in the hopes that winter winds will blow lots of them away, lazy me. It actually works to some degree but there’s always plenty left so I get to get out my rake and tarp again. I spread the tarp, rake the leaves onto it then drag the tarp off to dump. After about a dozen tarp-fulls I admire my way too small patch of exposed “lawn” (green stuff that can be mowed) and quit for the day. Repeat next warm days until the grass (green stuff) is too high and needs mowing. I know, I should use a mulching mower. Mine is, actually, but I have way too many leaves and way too little sun (remember - lots of trees) to not clear as much as I can. Some years I get most of the leaves off.

On days when I can’t deal with sticking, ditching and raking, I wedge in a few other clean-ups: pruning my roses and trumpet vine, clearing away winter mulch and dead foliage, pulling early weeds. If I’m having a good year, I’m happy if I get my dahlias, lilies and glads in the ground before May. Things I start indoors usually die on me so I tend to wait and plant annual seeds directly in the ground or buy sale plants. If perennials get divided, it’s whenever I get a whim to do so and I cross my fingers. As for any evergreens, lawn and grasses I have, they’re on their own.

Some master gardener, huh? As I replied to someone who asked if I had a green thumb, “It’s a very pale green”.



SIGNS OF SPRING



Photo from Linda Ferris

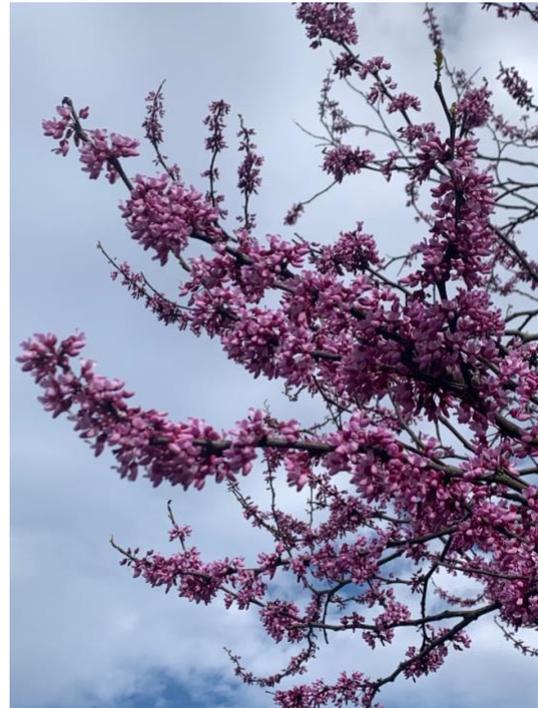


Photo from Renee Lloyd

MORE SIGNS OF SPRING



Photo from Richard Kaleba



Photos from (L) Greg Recht and (R) Renee Lloyd



Major Reasons To Not Use A Rototiller In Your Garden – Forever!

Did you know that one of the best ways to have less weeds, better soil – and a more productive garden than ever this year is to stop using a rototiller in your garden?

In spite of what many think – you *can and will* have a better garden by simply not using a rototiller. In fact, in the long run, you will save time, money, have less weeds and far better soil – and yes, a much larger harvest as well – all by keeping a rototiller out of your garden space!

A rototiller is actually great for certain tasks. It's perfect for creating smooth soil for planting grass. And yes, it can certainly be helpful in creating your first garden space from a grass covered lot. But beyond that, a rototiller truly does more harm than good in a garden.

In fact, you can save a tremendous amount of money, time and garden work by *not* owning one. Whenever I see a large bare-soil plot of tilled garden space, all I can think of is how much work went into tilling that entire area. Tilling it up, re-tilling it. Then, tilling it again to get the soil chunks out so that you can rake it and create planting rows. And that is, of course, if you can get that done between the rains. Or, if the soil is even dry enough to till.

Many gardens that are tilled get delayed in the spring due to the soil being too wet to work. And if you do make the mistake of tilling it wet, those big chunks of soil can spell even more disaster.

So how does a rototiller make gardening harder? Let's use a typical 40' x 20" backyard garden as an example. If you were to till the entire garden a few times to get smooth soil, even with a large tiller, it would take several hours. And you would still need to rake it, and then carve out rows for spacing and planting. That can take hours and hours – and if the soil is wet – even longer.

But once the garden is planted, the work continues. For a conventionally tilled garden, this means running the tiller once every week or two (even more for some) between all of the rows to keep weeds at bay. And then of course, hoeing anything you can't get with the tiller.

It's a lot of work, and it also never seems to end! But in a no-till garden using mulch, you never need to work the whole garden. The walking areas are simply mulched heavily forever. It instantly reduces the space you work by 75%.

Our planting and root zone spaces take up less than 25% of our garden, with the rest being for walking rows between plants. Better yet, the space is always workable, even after heavy spring rains. And there is never a need to till in season.

Tilling causes more weed issues than it ever helps to eliminate. Every time tilling occurs in the soil, thousands of weed seeds laying on the surface of the soil are driven into the soil. And the vicious cycle of tilling and re-tilling to eliminate the next batch begins.

By simply not using that rototiller, and not disturbing the soil, you will eliminate nearly all of your weeding issues over time. That's right, by working less, you can have even less weeds! By simply using mulch instead of tilling, the weeds' seeds never have a chance to go into the ground.

And with every year that follows, the weeds and work become even less of an issue with no-till gardening. It's hard to believe, but we now spend less than 15 minutes a week in our garden worrying about weeds or weeding. And it continues to become less and less with each passing year.

Now that we have covered how tilling can cost you time – and create more weeds, let's take a look at one more way it can cause harm to your garden – by hurting your soil's structure.

In addition to causing all of those weeds, tilling also plays a part in the demise of soil structure. Healthy plants need healthy soil. And believe it or not, tilling, especially over-tilling, all but destroys great soil.

Many think that loose, tiny, fragmented soil left behind after 15 passes with a rototiller is a good thing. In reality, it is detrimental to your soil, and, the long-term health and productivity of your plants.

As the tines of a rototiller plow through the soil, the natural state of the soil's structure is compromised. Undisturbed soil is alive and filled with organic matter. It is loaded with bacteria, nutrients, and millions of microorganisms that are working hard to give life to the soil.

In addition, worms and other ground dwellers have created channels as they chew through the soil. Those channels help to bring oxygen and water into the ground below, making it easy for plants to find the nutrients they need to thrive. Left alone, it is full of life.

But as soon as the tines go through the soil, that natural harmony is broken apart. Making matters worse, that loose soil left behind compacts easily, and can suffocate roots as it does.

And as the soil compresses, the channels and air pockets disappear. In turn, it makes it hard for the roots of your vegetable plants to get the nutrients they need. The result is an under-performing garden with soil that can't hold or deliver nutrients.

So at the end of the day – it really is best to leave that tiller out of your garden! Here is to gardening without a rototiller – and to having better soil, less weeds – and a bigger harvest!

Happy Gardening, Jim & Mary.

Jim and Mary Competti have been writing gardening, DIY and recipe articles and books for over 15 years from their 46 acre Ohio farm. The two are frequent speakers on all things gardening and love to travel in their spare time.

<https://oldworldgardenfarms.com>

Note: This article was edited for brevity.



Lunch and Learn on April 12, 2025 at Noon

Hosted by: The Master Gardeners of Roane County

The Joy of Gardening with Children

Presented by Whitney Hale



Please join us to learn practical ways to engage children in gardening. This class will include tips and examples of activities for gardening with children including ways to create a joy and love of gardening in the next generation.

The speaker, Whitney Hale, is the Education Coordinator at the University of Tennessee Gardens in Knoxville. She presents gardening classes about the wonders of nature and the benefits of being around plants.

About the MGRC Lunch and Learn Series:

The classes are short one-hour educational programs delivered by Master Gardeners or expert guests.

Topics vary from month to month based upon the latest research tips, requests from the community, and seasonal relevance.

Sessions are held at Noon at the Extension Office, on the second Saturday of each month. Classes are Free and open to the public.

Bring a sack lunch if you wish

Upcoming Schedule:

- May 17: Growing Beautiful Roses in East Tennessee
- June 14: The Art of Floral Arrangement

WAYS TO JOIN LUNCH & LEARN

In Person at the Extension Office 3074 Roane State Hwy Harriman, TN
Virtually using one of the following links: **Zoom:** tiny.utk.edu/MGRCLNL
Facebook: tiny.utk.edu/FacebookLive **YouTube:** tiny.utk.edu/UTRoaneYoutube



Contact Us:
Master Gardeners of Roane County
Roane County Extension Office
eMail: JessicaWSmith@utk.edu

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Do We Really Need a Big Lawn?

by Kristi DuBois (as seen in the Crossville Chronicle)

Baseball, hotdogs, apple pie..... and huge lawns. Golf course-sized lawns surrounding ordinary homes seems a very American thing. Most homes in other countries don't have large manicured grassy areas but instead flowers, shrubs, and vegetable patches; if they do have a lawn, it is usually small and functional. Maybe it's time we did the same.

There are justifiable reasons to have a lawn. Maybe we need a place for our children and dogs to run and play or a defensible space around our house in a fire-prone area. Perhaps we want grassy walkways between ornamental areas. But for the most part, there are many reasons why we should consider decreasing the size of our lawn.

Homeowners use, on average, 10 times more chemical pesticides and fertilizers per acre on their lawns as farmers do on crops, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These chemicals are often poorly applied and timed, so that in the rain, the polluted water runs into our stormwater drains and then into lakes and streams, harming aquatic life.

Lawns use an incredible amount of water. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 30-60% of urban fresh water is used on lawns, and much of that is wasted. Think of all the times you've seen a sprinkler watering a sidewalk on a hot, sunny day.

Lawns are often monocultures of just one species of grass. In such a homogeneous environment, there is not enough food or shelter for wildlife like birds and pollinating insects.

Lawns require a lot of maintenance, and the machines we use to maintain them are often polluting. The University of Delaware Cooperative Extension says that the average riding mower emits as much air pollution in one hour as 34 cars. Not to mention that on a beautiful, sunny day, nothing destroys the peace of a neighborhood more than a noisy lawnmower.

There are many reasons to decrease the size of your lawn, and fortunately, there are beautiful and even low maintenance alternatives. And you don't need to get rid of all your lawn to make a difference. Even small changes implemented slowly year by year can have an impact.

One of the first things you can do is assess what plants you already have in your yard and build around them. Many yards here remnant native trees, and these can form the backbone of your gardens. In our backyard we have about a dozen oaks, which are hugely important to wildlife, with gorgeous flowering dog woods hovering underneath. This is the perfect place for establishing woodland gardens; grass struggles under oak trees anyway. Why not plant dappled shade-loving plants with decorative foliage like native ferns, heucheras, brunnera, or winter-blooming helleborus? If you mulch or grow a low-growing ground cover like creeping phlox, you eventually won't have to mow around the trees, which is a pain anyway.

If you don't have native trees or want to add trees to "empty" parts of your yard, consider showy smaller trees that can be focal points and the foundation of small garden areas. We've recently added a redbud, flowering crab apple, dwarf red buckeye, and white fringe tree to open areas in our yard, and already birds are perching on their branches.

Shrubs also add structure and wildlife habitat and are excellent on the edges of yards and wooded areas. Native shrubs are very beautiful and have the added advantage of needing less care than European or Asian

imports because they are adapted to our environment. Some native shrubs that have done particularly well for us on the Plateau are possumhaw viburnum, rabbit eye blueberry, oakleaf hydrangea, winterberry, and fothergilla.

If you have sunny areas in your yard, consider adding a flower garden for pollinators like our native bees and butterflies. You can expand the flower beds you already have or start new ones. Native perennials are the best: purple coneflower, thread leaf coreopsis, brown-eyed Susans, New England asters, blazing stars, wild bergamot, butterfly weed—all of these have beautiful blooms that attract our native pollinators.

Rain gardens can be flower-filled areas for pollinators, and they also serve the purpose of absorbing and cleaning excess water coming from down spouts and runoff ditches. Plants that do well in these often soggy and hard to mow areas are ones that don't mind wet feet like joe pye, rose mallow hibiscus, cardinal flower, rough leaved golden rod, river oats, and switch grass.

Raised vegetable beds are also a way to decrease the size of your lawn; vegetable flowers feed many bees, and you can benefit mentally and physically from growing and eating your own food.

If you like the clean, open look of a lawn, consider planting a more biodiverse bee lawn with native bunchgrass for soil aeration and forbs. Just be sure to buy the seed mix from a reputable source of native seeds. If you struggle to grow grass in a particularly shady area of your yard, surrender to the moss. Moss can be a beautiful lawn alternative, and nurseries are even selling it now.

Of course, it is probably not realistic or desirable to get rid of all your turf grass, but there are many things you can do to keep it healthier and more environmentally friendly. Keep the grass 3" tall at the minimum to maintain a vibrant root system. Use a less polluting electric or hand mower. Leave grass clippings and mulched leaves on your lawn, which will decrease your need for fertilizer; just be sure they don't clump and smother the grass.

And be more accepting of so-called "weeds": bees love clover flowers, and clover is beautiful intertwined with grass; flea bane daisies are cute and excellent early spring pollinator flowers; dandelions aerate the soil and provide habitat for worms. (And you can always eat dandelion greens if they take over!)

If you love gardening, mark your calendars for the Flower, Lawn, and Garden Festival on April 25 and 26 at the Cumberland County Complex (fairgrounds). The Cumberland County Master Gardeners and over 70 local businesses and non-profit organizations will be on hand selling plants, natural products, and gardening tools. Advice, of course, is free!



Extension Master Gardener Intern Training 2025



Schedule

January 28th

Local Training Kickoff- Meet the Cumberland County Master Gardeners

Weekly Schedule: Live teaching from 9-10:30 central, via zoom webinar. Two 45 minute lectures with a 1:30 hour local lab /tour following.

Feb. 4th - Introduction to TEMG and TN climates and geography- EMG Workgroup (Chaps 1,2)

Feb. 11th- Stewardship in TN- Andrea Ludwig and Emily Richards (Chapter 4)

Feb. 18th- Soils and soil management- Gregg Upchurch and Melody Rose (Chapters 5,6)

Feb. 25th- Botany and Propagation- Natalie Bumgarner and Lucas Holman (Chapter 3)

Mar. 4th- Sustainable landscape design and herbaceous plants- Mike Ross and Celeste Scott (Chapters 7,9)

Mar. 11th- Woody ornamentals and trees- Taylor Reeder and Lee Rumble (Chapter 8)

Mar. 18th- Turfgrass and weed management- Becky Bowling and Mitchell Mote (Chapter 10)

Mar. 25th- Entomology and integrated pest management- Seth Whitehouse and Chris Cooper (Chapter 13)

Apr. 1st- Plant pathology- Celeste Scott and Justin Stefanski (Chapter 14)

Apr. 8th- Vegetables- Amy Dunlap and Melody Rose (Chapter 11)

Apr. 15th- Fruits- Gregg Upchurch and Dave Lockwood (Chapter 12)

Apr. 22nd- Supporting pollinators and great plants for pollinators- Jennifer Tsuruda and Taylor Reeder (Chapter 16)

CCMG Committees Teams Positions : 2025

Ask a Master Gardener Desk	Debbie Ward
Bulb Sales Spring & Fall	Linda Ferris, Carolyn Jozwiak
Classes at the Garden	Julia Wood
Community Outreach	Connie Farley
Crossville Planting Projects	Carolyn Jozwiak
Decorating	
E-Mail Coordinator	Alan Baker
Fall Gardeners Festival	Leslie Mullican
Flower, Lawn & Garden Festival	Leslie Mullican, Margo Carroll
Garden Teas	Sue Partch
Hospitality	Ron & Rosie Drechnik Andrea & Tony Capannola
Intern Class Hosting & Welcome Team	Rita Reali, Julie Lesko / Greg Recht, Barbara Blackford, Carla Lund
KinderGarden	Sue Maruska
Membership Contact list	Alan Baker
Merchandise / Publications, Membership clothing	SK Smallwood & Margo Carroll
Newsletter	Jan Pitzer
PDG Spring Plant Sale	Leslie Mullican
PDG Coordinator Director	Vicki May
PDG Umbrella Committee Representative	Mike Barron
Plant Growing & Propagation	
Plateau Discovery Garden UT Membership	Erin Fletcher
Publicity	Kristi Dubois, Erin Fletcher
Rain Barrel Program	
Facebook - Members Group	Alan Baker
Facebook - Public Page	Erin Fletcher
Instagram - Public Page	
YouTube - Public Page	
Search For Excellence	
Speakers Bureau	Carol Burdett
Website	Kelsey Whitefield, Alan Baker

corrections 1/5/2025

Save the date

APRIL 25 & 26 2025



Marketplace-Food-Music-Demos
Cumberland County Community Complex
Crossville, Tennessee



Photo from Laura Riester

A SPECIAL NOTE OF THANKS TO ALL CONTRIBUTORS OF THE SPRING PHOTO CONTEST

THANKS for your contributions! Due to the high caliber of your entries, a winner was impossible to determine. The MAJOR AWARD (a leg lamp, perhaps?) will also consider future 2025 seasonal Photo Contest entries. Dates TBD