Dear Bradford County Extension Clientele,

Hello, I hope you all are doing well during this time of uncertainty. Wow, this is like nothing most of us have ever seen. I can remember my grandparents talking about the depression and hard times, but never dreamed I would see a pandemic like we are all experiencing now. I know that we will come out of this much stronger than before. It’s times like this when folks really need to think about where their food comes from and the importance of Agriculture in our everyday lives.

Our Extension Office is closed to public access, but our Extension Agents and staff are working as normal to answer questions and provide solutions in the areas of Agriculture, Family & Consumer Sciences, Environmental Horticulture, and 4-H Youth Development. Although this COVID-19 has got us all working at alternate locations, our Extension Agents are developing and pushing out information in many different platforms. We just wanted to share some important information during this time, to our clientele and let you know we are here. Communication with one another is the key! Please call our office during normal work hours or email the Extension Agents directly.

Stay Safe!

Cynthia B. Sanders, Ph.D.
UF/IFAS Interim Extension Bradford County
Greetings from the 4-H office. As we all adjusting to this new distance way of living, we are missing our 4-H families and volunteers. The office has been working on several ideas to provide some interesting and fun virtual opportunities. The first of which was the County Council meeting which was held Thursday night and open to all Bradford county 4-H members. At this meeting they held a virtual funny homemade mustache contest, an in-home scavenger hunt and talked about a few things for the May meeting. What a blast!

We are soon to announce two more contest in which 4-H members and even volunteers can win gift cards as well as announcing summer day camp opportunities. While all these educational opportunities will be virtual, we are making them as interactive and fun as possible, and they are open to all Bradford County 4-H members 5-18.

We will not be holding the Annual Awards Banquet in June, but rest assured we are working on moving the banquet date. We keep updating our members via 4-H News, FaceBook and email.

We know that COVID-19 has been stressful for everyone, so please know that we are only an email, phone, or Zoom call away.

Thinking of you, Kim and Stephanie

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**Reminders**

**May 15th** - Record Books and Awards Applications Due

If you have any question please email: Stephanie Conner, Interim 4-H Agent sconner04@ufl.edu or Kimberly Griffis, Executive Secretary kPaul@ufl.edu
The Importance of Gardening

How can gardening help with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic? Gardening has always been a recreational activity that can provide great personal benefit, help relieve stress and provide nutritious food for local residents. During this time, when many people are working at home and students are learning at home, gardening in raised beds can be a positive family-inclusive activity to adopt. Several late spring and summer crops to consider planting in Bradford County include southern peas, okra, and sweet potatoes. If you are interested in preparing for your fall vegetable gardening season, southern peas are a great choice to help fix nitrogen in their roots and improve soil fertility for future season. It is best to grow these as a cover crop and incorporate plants into the soil before they are fully mature. This will help nourish your soil with more nitrogen for the fall. You can also grow and harvest the peas if you like, but its overall benefit to the soil itself. Another option is sweet potatoes which are healthy and grow on beautiful vines. Growing this crop is a great way to keep weeds from growing in your garden in excess while keeping it beautiful all summer long. Okra is an additional planting option that has beautiful flowers and will also keep weeds to a minimum. When planting it is best to mulch in order to keep weeds down and help conserve soil moisture. Observe your plants to make sure they are getting enough water and understand plants grown in containers will need more frequent watering to avoid unnecessary stress.

Luke Miller
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Raised-bed gardening is a convenient way to grow vegetables at home.
Food Preservation Safety

Food preservation allows you to save on your food budget and right now utilizing farmers markets can help you expand your food dollars. Many of our grandparents and maybe even our parents used food preservation to cut down on food waste and to have certain foods available all year long. Starting to preserve your left over produce will cut down on the use of canned foods that are high in sodium, which can lead to health issues in the future. Food preservation can be freezing, canning or even drying. Below we will focus on food safety and canning which is a technique that is slowly making its way back to popularity. Canning was very popular in the past but one must be careful when using this technique for food preservation. The easiest way to can your food is by using the hot water bath technique. Due to food being preserved in a jar, if done improperly it can increase your risk of food borne illnesses. When using the hot water bath method please be aware this should be used for preserving high acidic foods. Canning low acidic foods using a pressure cooker will kill harmful toxins if done properly. Many recipes can be found online on how to can your wanted produce, never take shortcuts when your health is at risk.

During your canning process, never use contaminated tools or old lids. Always make sure to use clean dry jars that went through a sterilization process. An easy way to sterilize is to place thoroughly washed jars into boiling water for a minimum of 10 minutes at least. Once the jars are sterilized, place them in a clean location and then proceed to sterilize your rings and lids. Never use old lids when starting a new batch because the lid might not seal proper leaving an open door for toxins and/or bacteria. Before using your canned foods, inspect your jars for any signs of potential danger. When opening your jar look for signs of bacteria such as growth or mold and the lid should have a good suction to the jar. If your jar shows signs of any leaking, cracks or the lid is swollen please disregard the food item immediately.

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