

CENTER PIVOT NEWSLETTER

UF/IFAS EXTENSION SUWANNEE COUNTY
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The Jackson Family with Erin Jones and Raymond Balaguer.

2024 Farm Family of the Year

The Jackson Family was recognized as the 2024 Farm Family of the Year. This family has been involved in farming for several years here in Suwannee County, they actively grow peanuts, grain corn, iron clay peas, brown top millet, and cattle. This family was recognized for their efforts in 2001 for their engagement in conservation practices by being named the Conservationist Farm Family of the Year. In 2001, this Family also received the County Alliance of Responsible Environmental Stewardship Award, known as the CARES award. This family has been instrumental in adopting Best Management Practices on the farm, many farmers in Suwannee County recognize the family as the pioneers of strip tillage, a practice used for planting row crops that protect the soil health. Other practices utilized include using no-till planting methods, cover crops to improve soil health, soil moisture probes to minimize water usage, mobile irrigation unit to ensure equipment is working properly, and tissue sampling to minimize fertilizer applications. This family has always been ready and willing to work with the University of Florida and the Florida Department of Agriculture to open their operation to on farm trials to benefit producers statewide. This family has participated in on farm peanut variety trials, competed in the UF Stakeholder Engagement Program for corn production, and they have opened their farm to be utilized in the Best Management Practices 5-year soil Health Project where research was conducted to demonstrate the benefit of integrated crop management. When thinking about preservation of agriculture here in our county we are blessed to have farm families like this one that are willing to be open minded to new best management practices and be willing to adapt those to their farming operations. This family has been actively involved in agriculture for 4 generations and 3 of those generations work together every day to maintain their farming enterprise.

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Carter Family with Erin Jones

2024 Southeastern Hay Contest Winner

The Southeastern Hay Contest is open to any hay or baleage producer from Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma (east of I-35), South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas (east of I-35), or Virginia. This year Suwannee County was home to the 2024 Overall Hay Contest Winner Mr. Doug Carter and his family. The Carter family entered a sample in the legume/grass mix of alfalfa and orchard grass mix. This sample had a RFQ of 309, Total Digestible Nutrients of 72.6%, and a Crude Protein of 27.6%. The Carter family are active farmers in the ag community and their farm is located in McAlpin. Mr. Doug won a cash prize and the choice of the usage of Massey Ferguson rotary rake or disc mower for the 2025 hay season. Entries are now open to submit your hay samples for the 2025 hay contest. If you are interested in proving your hay is the best, please contact our office today to sample your hay.



Every Wednesday: Volunteer Workday at Greenhouse, Extension office, 8:30am-11:30am

Seed Library: Live Oak, Branford, & Dowling Park, stop by and pickup seeds.

MGV Plant Clinic Q&A at the Live Oak Library: Wednesdays 1pm - 3pm

1: New Years Day, Extension Office Closed

9: MGV Alumni Workday & Meeting

10: Hands-On Gardening Workshop: Tips for Veggies

13: Matter of Balance Class in Branford (First in Series - Registration required)

14: Walking Off the Holidays - SportsPlex

15: ServSafe Class at Extension Office

16: Matter of Balance Class in Branford

16: Live Oak Library Lunch & Learn: Gardening Series: Pruning Blueberries & Orchard Trees – 12pm – 1pm

17: Hands-On Gardening Workshop: Seed Starting

17: Heritage Park & Gardens: Tree Planting & Giveaway – 10am

20: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Extension Office Closed

21: Matter of Balance Class in Branford

23: Matter of Balance Class in Branford

24: Hands-On Gardening Workshop: Deciduous Fruit Grown in North FL

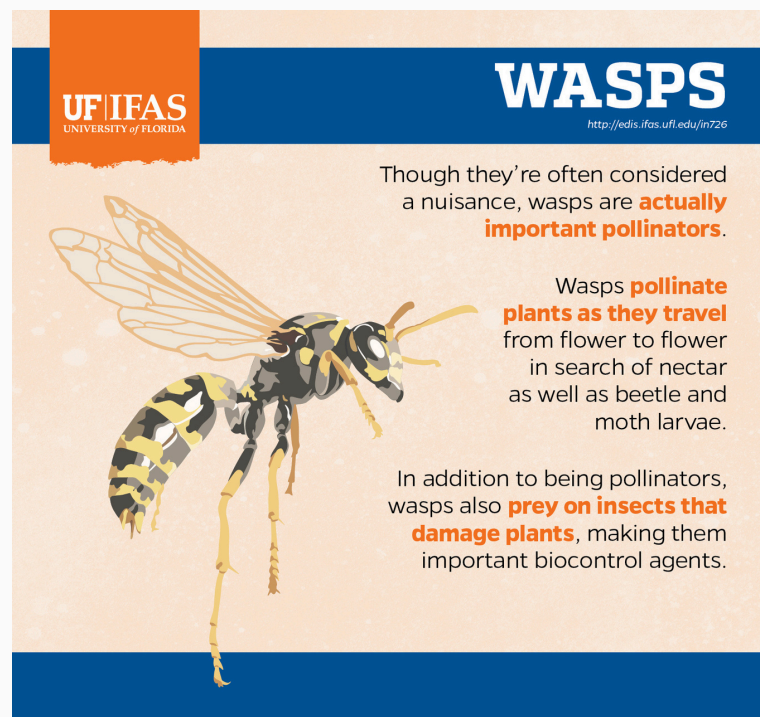
27: Community Sewing Day at the Extension Office

28: Matter of Balance Class in Branford

28: Tri-State Fruit & Vegetable Conference at Jackson County Extension

30: Matter of Balance Class in Branford

31: Hands-On Gardening Workshop: All About Herbs



FEBRUARY 2025

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Seed Library: Live Oak, Branford, & Dowling Park, stop by and pickup seeds.

MGV Plant Clinic Q&A at the Live Oak Library: Wednesdays 1pm - 3pm

1: All Aboard Festival – Heritage Square, Live Oak

4: Matter of Balance Class in Branford

5: Matter of Balance Class in Live Oak (First in Series – Registration Required)

6: Matter of Balance Class in Branford (Last in Series)

7: Hands-On Gardening Workshop: Composting, Vermicomposting, & Soil Amendments

12: Matter of Balance Class in Live Oak

13: Soil Health & Cover Crop Field Day

13: MGV Alumni Workday & Meeting

13 & 20: Homebuyer's Class (Online – Registration Required)

14: Hands-On Gardening Workshop: Citrus

19: Matter of Balance Class in Live Oak


20: Live Oak Library Lunch & Learn: Gardening Series: Growing Tomatoes – 12pm – 1pm

22: North Florida Outdoor Expo – Micanopy

26: Matter of Balance Class in Live Oak

27: Live Oak Library Lunch & Learn: Homesteading Series: Orchard and Garden Layout & Design – 12pm – 1pm

28: Community Sewing Day at the Extension Office




WASPS

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in726>

Though they're often considered a nuisance, wasps are **actually important pollinators**.

Wasps **pollinate plants as they travel** from flower to flower in search of nectar as well as beetle and moth larvae.

In addition to being pollinators, wasps also **prey on insects that damage plants**, making them important biocontrol agents.



MARCH 2025

UF/IFAS EXTENSION SUWANNEE COUNTY
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Seed Library: Live Oak, Branford, & Dowling Park, stop by and pickup seeds.

MGV Plant Clinic Q&A at the Live Oak Library: Wednesdays 1pm - 3pm

1: UF/IFAS Open House

4: Cottage Food

5: Matter of Balance Class in Live Oak

6: Oyster Mushroom Workshop at the Extension Office

7: 4th Annual Deluca Bioblitz – Okeechobee Preserve

12: Matter of Balance Class in Live Oak

12: MGV Plant Sale *weather permitting

13: MGV Alumni Workday & Meeting

18: ServSafe Class at Extension Office

19: Matter of Balance Class in Live Oak

19: MGV Plant Sale *weather permitting

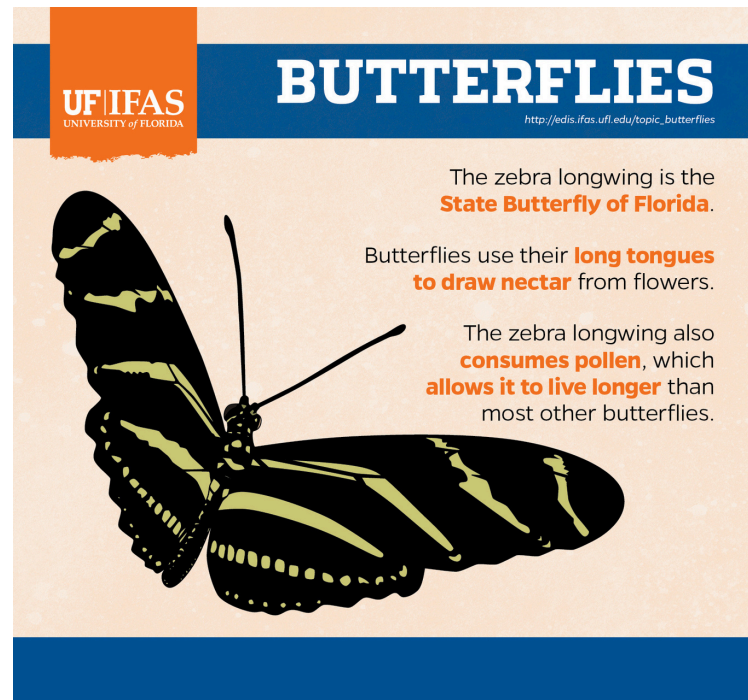
20: Live Oak Library Lunch & Learn: Gardening Series: Flowering Shrubs & Trees for North FL – 12pm – 1pm

21-22: Bee College at UF Gainesville

21-29: Suwannee County Fair

26: Matter of Balance Class in Live Oak

27: Live Oak Library Lunch & Learn: Homesteading Series: Cottage Food Laws– 12pm – 1pm



PLANNING ON GROWING A VEGETABLE GARDEN, TEST YOUR SOIL NOW!



CAROLYN SAFT, ENVIROMENTAL HORTICULTURE AGENT
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Planning on following up on your New Year's resolution of eating more vegetables and growing them yourself? Soil testing enables you to find out acidity or alkalinity of the soil. A pH value of 7 is neutral, a pH of less than 7 indicates acidic soil, and a pH greater than 7 is alkaline. Sometimes you may see a soil referred to as "sour" (meaning acidic) or "sweet" (to mean alkaline).

December was the best time to test your soil pH. Keep in mind if you must add soil amendments, time is needed for chemical reactions in the soil. Lime may take up to six months to fully raise soil pH. Most vegetables grow best in soils with a pH of 5.8-6.3. The good news is that if your soil pH is 5.5-7.0, you do not really need to adjust your soil.

Soil pH directly affects the growth and quality of many plants by influencing both the chemical elements in the soil and the soil microbial processes. Plants may exhibit nutrient deficiency or toxicity symptoms because of highly acidic or alkaline soil pH. For example, when soils are acidic the availability of plant nutrients like potassium (K), calcium (Ca), and magnesium (Mg) is reduced. At the same time, acidic soils have increased availability of potentially toxic elements like aluminum (Al), iron (Fe), and zinc (Zn).

Florida soil pH varies widely; the median soil pH is 6.1 which is slightly acidic. However, soils formed around pine flatwoods can be quite acidic, while soils formed from limestone, marl, or seashells are more alkaline. Alkaline soils are common in-home landscapes. due to building materials, rich in calcium carbonate, which may have been left in the soil after construction.

PLANNING ON GROWING A VEGETABLE GARDEN, TEST YOUR SOIL NOW!



CAROLYN SAFT, ENVIROMENTAL HORTICULTURE AGENT
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The soil sample should accurately represent the area that will be planted and managed. The items needed to take a soil sample include a clean, plastic bucket, a shovel (or soil probe), and a paper bag or newspaper. Follow these steps to properly collect a soil sample:

1. Identify the area to be sampled. Turf areas, vegetable gardens and ornamental beds should all be sampled separately.
2. Using a shovel (or soil probe), remove soil from 10 to 15 locations within the sampling area. Soil should be removed from the top 6 inches. Walk in a zigzag pattern, stopping occasionally to remove soil for the sample.
3. After taking each sub-sample, remove any plant material or mulch and deposit the soil into the plastic bucket. Mix the soil in the bucket to ensure it is well blended.
4. Spread the soil out on a newspaper or paper grocery bag and allow it to dry thoroughly.
5. Once dry, pack approximately 1 pint of soil (fill to the dotted line) into a soil sample bag (available free from your local UF/IFAS Extension office). Alternatively, you may pack soil into a zip-top plastic bag.
6. If you submit for Test B (adds analysis of phosphorus (P), potassium (K), calcium (Ca), and magnesium (Mg) and fertilizer recommendations), be sure and fill out the form with the proper crop code so the right fertilizer recommendations can be given.

Best wishes for a bountiful harvest in 2025!

4-H YOUTH ARE BEYOND READY TO COMMUNICATE

KATIE JONES, 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENT
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I can remember it like it was yesterday. My first 4-H demonstration at eight years old was how to make Pepperoni Pull-apart bread. The skills I learned through my 4-H public speaking opportunities have had a major impact on my career path—eventually leading me to be a teacher and extension educator. But not everyone has those same confidence building experiences with public speaking.

Glossophobia is the fear of public speaking and is so common that it affects about 25% of people. And while most people are not completely debilitated by their fear of speaking, many people are familiar with the sweaty palms, shaky voice and racing pulse that remind us of our own nervousness about speaking in front of crowds. Effective oral communication, especially speaking in front of an audience is a vital skill for career success.

The ability to articulate ideas clearly and confidently can impact job interviews or performance evaluations. Effective public speaking is associated with confidence, charisma and the ability to inspire others, and the leadership advantage that comes with confidence in front of crowds often translates into more opportunities for professional growth and ultimately higher salaries.

One of the things that 4-H is known for doing is helping youth be “Beyond Ready” for success in life is to help them develop public speaking skills from an early age. Beginning with simply standing up in their 4-H club meetings to give a project report, 4-H members progress through the different public speaking development activities to help them conquer their fears of speaking in public. By learning to face their fears of speaking early, participating youth are setting themselves up as leaders for the future of our community.

In January, Suwannee County 4-H will hold many of its public speaking contests. Our County Events include Public Speaking, Illustrations and Demonstrations. These three contests help youth to develop their speaking skills and offer them the opportunity to share their interests with an audience. In the Public Speaking contest, youth present a three-to-seven-minute (depending on the age of the participant) speech that is related in some way to their 4-H experiences. This contest is done without props.

4-H YOUTH ARE BEYOND READY TO COMMUNICATE

KATIE JONES, 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENT
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Illustrated talks are presentations about a topic of the speaker's choice. They can have props and posters to help them remember what they wanted to share with the audience. Demonstrations are like Illustrated Talks because they can have props to help them. The difference is that in demonstrations, they show a step-by-step process to the audience. The topics can vary from cooking to crafting to how to give an animal a shot. The important part is that they are demonstrating how to do a skill.

Also, this month, we will also host our County contest for the Florida 4-H Public Speaking Program. Formerly known as the Tropicana Speaking Program, the Florida 4-H Public Speaking Program is now sponsored by Florida Power and Light. This contest begins with the assistance of classroom teachers at each of our public and private schools in Suwannee County. Our 4th, 5th and 6th grade teachers provide lessons on how to write a 2-to-3-minute speech and then present that speech. Competition is fierce as over 1000 Suwannee County students work to advance to the county contest where just 15 speakers present their speeches.

My own public speaking experiences began at an early age, and I am convinced that conquering that fear early in life helped me be Beyond Ready for my own future. 4-H is ready to help all the youth in Suwannee County develop those same communication skills so that they too can be successful communicators and future leaders of our community, state and nation.

VACUUMS: MAKE SURE YOURS SUCKS

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Vacuums are important to keep your home free of dirt, dust, pet hair and allergens. It should be a part of your weekly routine because it also helps with pest control, not only removing the insect and insect parts, but also any eggs the insect might have laid. Although a survey suggested most Americans vacuum 2-3 times a week, a general rule of thumb is to vacuum a day each week for every occupant in the home. If there are inside pets, add an extra day per pet.

How you vacuum is just as important as how much you vacuum. The features vary, but adjustable height, “full-bag” sensors and variable motor speed all affect your vacuum’s performance. The key to cleaning carpeted floors is to have suction, air flow and good filtration. It is important to agitate the carpet with a mechanical brush roller, while the suction and air flow pick up the dirt and move it into the receptacle or bag.

Which Height is Right?

Many models allow height adjustment for different surfaces. A lower height setting doesn’t necessarily mean a deeper clean. If it’s too low, it won’t clean properly. Most manufacturers recommend a higher setting for thicker carpets and a lower height for low-pile carpet or bare floor.

With the handle reclined, start the vacuum in the highest position, lower until you hear a change in sound. The deeper sound indicates the brush is sweeping properly.

Bag or No Bag?

Bagless and bagged vacuums both require maintenance. Each must be emptied (empty outside to prevent dust from redepositing in the home). A bagless vacuum will eliminate the need to buy bags, but they have filters that need to be changed/cleaned. Bagged vacuums trap the dirt inside a replaceable bag. Some units have a “full bag” indicator to tell when it is time to change the bag. Inside pets escalate the need to change bags or empty dirt receptacles more frequently to prevent clogs.

VACUUMS: MAKE SURE YOURS SUCKS

KATHERINE ALLEN, FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES AGENT
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Check the brush for hair. It can decrease its efficacy and cause strain on the vacuum's belt. Clean regularly for the best performance.

Push Faster Than You Pull?

Did you know that vacuums are designed to be pushed at a specific speed? Your backward pull must be slower than your forward push because brushes on vacuums rotate forward, turning from the back to the front. Pulling back slowly gives the brush time to capture the dirt because the vacuum is going in the opposite direction of the brush. If vacuuming a wood or tile floor, turn off the brush roll feature so it doesn't scatter dirt and debris. This also prevents the bristles from damaging the floor.

Although no one likes to do housework, taking time and not going too fast, especially on a bare floor or a high traffic area, is important to maximizing the vacuum's ability.

Clean from top to bottom. Curtains, shelves, etc. first and then the floor. When the dust drifts down, you will only have to vacuum once.

For canister vacuums, the proper "pulling" technique is to wrap the hose around your back and hold the wand in the left hand. The canister will move without pulling on the full hose length.

The various settings and features incorporated into many vacuum models, combined with the proper technique, will help you maximize your vacuum's ability to help you keep your home free from dust and dirt. Happy cleaning in the New Year!

WALKING OFF THE HOLIDAYS

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Walking is one of the most accessible and effective ways to kickstart a healthier lifestyle in the new year. This simple exercise offers a range of physical benefits for people of all ages and fitness levels. Regular walking improves cardiovascular health by strengthening the heart, improving circulation, and lowering blood pressure. It also aids in maintaining a healthy weight, burns calories, and helps regulate blood sugar levels. Walking strengthens muscles and bones without the strain of high-intensity activities, making it a great option for those with joint issues or people looking for a gentle but effective form of exercise.



In addition to the physical advantages, walking can also improve mental health. Studies have shown that walking helps reduce stress, anxiety, and symptoms of depression. The rhythmic nature of walking, combined with being outdoors, can have a calming effect, allowing the mind to reset and recharge. Walking is also known to enhance creativity and problem-solving, making it a great activity for those seeking clarity and focus, especially when setting new goals for the year.

Some of the greatest benefits of walking are its convenience and accessibility. It doesn't require special equipment, a gym membership, or a structured routine to enjoy its advantages. Walking can be done anywhere, from your local park to city streets or even around your neighborhood. Whether you take a brisk walk in the morning or a casual stroll in the evening, it's easy to incorporate walking into your daily life. Starting the new year with regular walks promotes a sustainable, long-term approach to health and well-being, allowing you to reap physical and mental rewards throughout the year.

Are you looking for an activity to jumpstart your wellness journey? Join us for [*Walking Off the Holidays*](#) hosted by the Department of Health - Suwannee, UF IFAS Suwannee County Extension, and Suwannee County Parks and Recreation. This event is designed to encourage residents to begin the new year in an active and fun way, helping to shed those extra holiday pounds. It will take place on [*Tuesday, January 14, 2025, from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. at the First Federal Sportsplex*](#). Participants can enjoy activities, explore educational exhibits, and win prizes. Don't miss this opportunity to get moving and start your year on the right foot!



Soil Sampling

Nutrient levels in the soils vary from farm to farm . Maintaining a proper pH level is critical for healthy forages. Soil test can help you to identify specific deficiencies and also provide a recommendation to maximize plant production. The three primary nutrients being assessed are nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K). Soil sample should be taken random across the pasture to ensure a representative sample is acquired.

Rotational Grazing

Developing a plan to rest your pasture allows you to grow more forage. Resting a pasture reduces plant stress and allow forages to recuperate and establish new growth. Repeated intense grassing can cause damages to the plant and increase the potential for plant elimination. Pasture should be grasses when grasses are 7 to 10 inches tall and removed when grasses are 3-4 inches.

Stocking Rate

The amount of land required for each species of livestock depends upon:

- The type and productivity of the crop.
- The size and age of the livestock.
- The grazing management practices used.

Pasture that are heavily stocked cannot support the total nutrition to your livestock. Over stocking can also deplete forages and allow weeds to take the pasture over.

Pasture Mowing

Mowing pastures can help maintain uniformity and help generate dense, leafy vegetation. It can also help with weed reduction by promoting the productivity of favorable species. When mowing you also promote new growth that will be more palatable and nutritious. Mowing at the proper height is also important to maintain the health and survival of pasture grasses. Most pasture grasses should be maintained at 3-5 inches when mowing.

GUIDE TO HEALTHY LIVESTOCK PASTURE

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Weed Management

Weeds can be a serious problem within your pastures because they compete with desired forages for space. Some weeds can be toxic and harmful to animal health if ingested. Good pasture management can help prevent weed proliferation. In some cases herbicides applications may be necessary, however, this will not provide a permanent control.

Pasture Dragging

Dragging pastures will help break up manure deposits and aerate the sod. This can be done with commercial tine or chain drags or homemade drag. Dragging pastures should be done a rotation. Determine when to drag will depend pasture size, stocking rate, weather conditions, nutrient practices, and the pasture quality. Dragging of pastures can be done in conjunction with mowing and fertilizing according to the soil analyzes for optimal growth.

Choosing Forage Variety

When choosing to establish forage species you should consider:

- Soil and Climate
- Season of Growth
- Forage Use (Grazing or Haying)
- Class of Livestock
- Level of Management Required

Forages to be considered for our environment:

- Bahiagrass (Perennial Grass)
- Bermudagrass (Perennial Grass)
- Pearl Millet (Summer Annual)
- Oats (Winter Annual)
- Rye (Winter Annual)
- Rye Grass (Winter Annual)
- Clovers (Winter Annual Legume)
- Perennial Peanut (Summer Legume)
- Alyceclover (Summer Legume)

** Sorghum and sudangrass hybrids CANNOT be grown because of prussic acid.

SEASON EXTENSION FOR HIGH VALUE CROPS USING HIGH TUNNELS

RAYMOND BALAGUER, COMMERCIAL HORTICULTURE, SMALL FARMS, & NATURAL RESOURCES AGENT
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North Florida's small farms can thrive on the production of seasonal vegetables, leveraging the region's mild winters and relatively long growing seasons to cultivate a diverse array of crops. Cool-season vegetables like kale, broccoli, and carrots can be grown during the fall and winter, while heat-tolerant crops such as okra, sweet potatoes, and eggplant can be grown in the summer. Farmers often utilize practices like crop rotation and sustainable techniques to optimize production and meet the demand for fresh, locally grown produce. This seasonal variety not only supports the region's agricultural economy but also provides consumers with a steady supply of nutritious and flavorful vegetables year-round.

High tunnels, sometimes called hoop houses, offer numerous benefits for extending the growing season in North Florida, offering more options to growers for seasonal production. These structures create a controlled microclimate, allowing crops to be planted earlier in the spring and harvested later in the fall. They protect plants from frosts, temperature fluctuations, and heavy rains that can damage crops. Depending on the design, high tunnels can act as a physical barrier against pests like aphids and whiteflies while also reducing weed growth, potentially reducing the need for chemical applications. They help farmers manage water more efficiently by reducing evaporation and runoff, making them ideal for integrating drip irrigation systems. Once a grower gets over the first couple of seasons and makes all the needed adjustments in labor and investments, the high tunnel can be used to grow crops of improved quality and yield. These structures can also reduce the risk of fungal diseases, like blight and mildew, by controlling moisture levels. The ability to grow high-value crops such as tomatoes, peppers, and leafy greens outside of their traditional seasons allows farmers to meet market demands and take advantage of higher prices, increasing profitability. With their versatility and potential to boost productivity, high tunnels can be a valuable tool for farmers in North Florida looking to overcome climate challenges and expand their operations.



Household Tips & Tricks

No More Tears

Cut onions near a lit candle to reduce the pesky eye-watering effect. You can also chill the onion in the refrigerator for 15 minutes before cutting,

Garlic Smell

To remove garlic smell from hands after cooking, rub your hands on anything made of stainless steel for 30 seconds under running water. Some home stores even sell soap-shaped “bars” of stainless steels for this purpose!

Safe & Easy Cleaning

Mix equal parts water and white vinegar in a spray bottle for easy and safe household cleaner. This mixture is all-purpose and effective for various surfaces around the house.

Tangle-Free Plastic Wrap

Store cling wrap in the refrigerator for a few minutes before using to avoid sticking. No more tangled-up plastic wrap frustrations!

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OUR MISSION OF EDUCATION.

UF/IFAS Extension provides practical education you can trust to help people, businesses and communities solve problems, develop skills and build a better future. When you use UF/IFAS Extension, you can be confident that experts have reviewed and developed educational programs to ensure that you receive the best information for your needs. UF/IFAS Extension employees and volunteers work hard at improving the quality of life for our neighbors and communities. We provide solutions to everyday problems. We offer a variety of educational programs and information:

Agriculture and Natural Resources: Local farmers and ranchers are provided technical assistance and education to enhance their profitability and sustainability.

Horticulture: Programs are designed to meet the needs of residents by utilizing Florida-Friendly Landscaping principles.

Master Gardener Volunteer Program: Master Gardener Volunteers receive training in exchange for service to the community. The Master Gardener Volunteers assist with the Seed Library and hold plant clinics every Wednesday from 1:00-3:00PM both at the Live Oak Library. Volunteers also staff a Seed Library and plant clinic at the Branford Library on Tuesdays from 2:00-5:00pm.

Family and Consumer Sciences: Family and Consumer Sciences programs offer you information about health and nutrition, food safety, food preservation, money management, home concerns, relationships, community development and many other topics.

4-H and Youth Development: The UF/IFAS Extension 4-H Youth Development program uses a learn-by-doing approach to help youth gain the knowledge and skills they need to be responsible, productive citizens. This mission is accomplished by creating safe and inclusive learning environments, involving caring adults, and utilizing the expertise and resources of the University of Florida and the nationwide land grant university system.

Carolyn Saft- County Extension Director, Environmental Horticulture Agent and Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinator

Katherine Allen- Family and Consumer Sciences Agent (FCS)

Bonnie Box- Nutrition Educator, Family Nutrition Program (FNP)

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