

Looking for Something Different to Plant in Your Garden This Year?

The Bibb County Extension Calendar is up at www.aces.edu/Bibb Currently listed are the ongoing cleanup of the Piper Trail at the Cahaba River by the Friends of the Cahaba National Wildlife Refuge, which continues through Friday and Saturday, February 15 and 16, and Extension's 1pm-5pm program on soil testing Thursday, March 6 at the Rock Building in Centreville. Also, we are looking to add even more entries for activities and programs that are engaging, educational, recreational, or otherwise beneficial to Bibb County. Call 205-926-3117 or email us from the website if you would like us to list something.

Looking to grow something different in your yard or garden this year? Consider herbs. Regional Extension Agent Tony Glover shares some great insights into starting and maintaining an herb garden.

Herbs have many attributes that contribute to their increasing popularity in gardens and landscapes. Historically, herbs have most commonly served culinary and medicinal purposes. Today, however, we also grow herbs (or "erbs") as aromatics, ornamentals, and for wildlife habitat. Herbs are considered one of the easiest groups of plants to grow, and once established, most are low maintenance; they do very well with little water or fertilizer.

While herbs are suited to a range of soil and growing conditions, most don't do well in poorly drained soil. Another limiting factor is the amount of available sun; if the site receives less than 6-8 hours of sun a day, either look for another site or consider herbs that can handle light shade.

The sun/shade factor is very important for pollinators, including honeybees, as they are attracted to plants that flower in full sun.

Another factor to consider is soil; heavy clay is challenging for most herbs. Make their life easier and more productive by planting herbs in raised beds or amending with composted organic matter to improve porosity.

Herbs are a solution to the need expressed by many beekeepers; to increase nectar availability in an area. They are versatile, blooming the same year they're planted in many cases. With sufficient variety, an herb garden can have plants in bloom 10 months of the year, providing nectar and pollen sources for honeybees. However, not all herbs attract honeybees, so pay attention to variety. Herbs such as basil, bee balm, hyssop (anise), mints, sage, and thyme are examples of bee favorites.

Designing an herb garden is similar to other gardens; segregate tall growing plants such as bee balm from low spreading herbs like thyme to minimize unwanted shading. Perennial herbs should be the focus since they will last for years, although annuals can be used as fillers.

Attracting a very special pollinator takes a little extra work, but the effort is worth it when you see and hear the hum of honey bees visiting your herbs.

For more information, see the publication ANR-1164 "Growing Herbs" at www.aces.edu/pubs or call the Bibb Co. Extension office at 205-926-3117.

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