

Coosa County Completes Grow Your Own Course

Whether it's the hard economic times, the concerns over food safety, the desire to get back to the land or some other reason, there seems to be a growing interest in people learning to produce their own food. The Coosa County Extension Office began to notice this trend early last fall, and so a series of classes were organized called "Grow Your Own (GYO).

The GYO classes were held once per month and covered a different topic each month. The first class was on "Raising Backyard Poultry". Extension poultry specialists, John Blake, Joe Hess and Ken Mackley from Auburn came up and discussed methods for small scale production of chickens for meat and eggs. They also covered information on turkeys, ducks, geese, quail and other potential kinds of poultry. The next class was a discussion on the "Establishment and Management of a Home Orchard". Regional Horticulture Agent, Chip East presented information on how to manage small fruits such as strawberries, blackberries and blueberries. He also covered the main topics on tree fruits such as apples, pears, peaches and persimmons.

The following month the topic shifted to "Growing a Home Vegetable Garden" presented by Regional Horticulture Agent, Shane Harris. With so many different vegetables and related topics to cover, it was a jam packed meeting, but the audience learned the basics of variety selection, fertilizing, watering, pest control and raised bed gardening.

In December the focus turned back to livestock with a program on "Raising Goats and Sheep". Richard from Alabama A&M visited the county and provided information on this growing farm enterprise. Sheep and goat are a great alternative for landowners who lack the land and equipment for raising cattle or other large animals. However, for those interested in beef cattle, the next month was a well attended program on "Raising Beef for the Freezer" presented by Regional Livestock Agent, Jack Tatum. He did a great job explaining the minimum facilities needed, how manage the feeding and health of the beef calf, and drew some informative cost projections. While it may be less expensive to just buy the beef at the store several in the audience expressed that they would be willing to pay a little more to produce their own meat.

Another topic that drew a good deal of attention was the class on "Honey Bees and Beekeeping". Master beekeeper, Damon Wallace presented this program to a novice group in which most had never had a honey bee hive but were interested in getting started. With the decline in wild populations of honey bees we need more people to take up bee keeping and Mr. Wallace did a great job of covering the basic equipment needs and management strategies.

Later in the spring our topic shifted to "Raising Catfish in Cages". Aquaculture Agent, David Cline presented this program and generated some very good discussion. He explained in great detail the projected costs and potential returns to raising catfish for you own use or for sale to small processors.

The "Grow Your Own" Course was concluded later in the spring of 2009 with a class to tie it all together on "Home Food Preservation". Regional Agent, Patti West gave a very informative class that touched on freezing, pressure canning, and other topics.

Throughout the “Grow Your Own” Course, participants were allowed to register for the entire course or take just the classes in which they were interested. Every participant received a notebook with dividers and publications were added to the different sections during each class. The entire course was evaluated at the completion with very promising results. One hundred percent of the participants rated the course as very good or excellent. Several expressed interest in going further by taking either the Master Gardener Course and/or the Master Food Preserver Course. Several commented that they plan to begin one or more of these farm enterprises that they had not been involved in before