

Agee's Insights

January/February/March 2012

Two Frogs

A group of frogs were traveling through the woods, and two of them fell into a deep pit. When the other frogs saw how deep the pit was, they told the two frogs they were as good as dead. The two frogs ignored the comments and tried to jump up out of the pit with all their might. The other frogs kept telling them to stop, that they were as good as dead. Finally, one of the frogs took heed to what the other frogs were saying and gave up, fell down and died.

The other frog continued to jump as hard as he could. Once again, the crowd of frogs yelled at him to stop the pain and just die. He jumped even harder and finally made it out. The other frogs asked "Did you not hear us telling you to give up?". The frog explained that he was deaf. He thought they were encouraging him the entire time.



Lesson of this story:

There is power of life and death in the tongue.
An encouraging word to someone who is down can lift them up and help them make it through the day.

A destructive word to someone who is down can be what it takes to kill them.

Be careful of what you say. Speak life to those who cross your path. The power of words... it is sometimes hard to understand that an encouraging word can go such a long way. Anyone can speak words that tend to rob another of the spirit to continue in difficult times. Special is the individual who will take the time to encourage another.

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas G. Agee".

Thomas G. Agee
County Extension Coordinator

Cold Weather and Protecting Plants

We are fortunate on one hand in that we experience very mild winters here in Southeast Alabama but on the other hand when cold temperatures do come, they are here quick and can be extreme. Many homeowners often ask about ways to protect their most prized plants. One method that is normally asked about is the use of irrigation for plant protection. This method is used successfully on citrus, strawberries and other horticultural crops in larger operations but may not be economically feasible for the homeowner. When use properly, water can provide partial or complete cold protection for a number of crops. On the other hand, improper use of water can increase cooling or ice loading and cause greater damage than if no water were used at all. Because water can provide protection in one situation and cause damage in another situation, it is important to know what principles are involved in cold protection.

Heat of Fusion

The heat that is released when liquid freezes to solid ice is called the heat of fusion. The amount of heat generated when water freezes is 1200 BTU/gallon or 80 calories/gram of water frozen. As long as enough water is continuously applied to a plant, the heat generated when the water freezes can keep the plant at or near 32 degrees F (0 degrees C).



Heat of Vaporization

The heat lost when water changes from a liquid to water vapor is called the heat of vaporization. At 32 degrees F, the heat of vaporization is about 8950 BTUs/gallon or 596 calories/gram of water. Note that the heat of vaporization is about 7.5 times greater than the heat of fusion. This means that to maintain a stable situation when both freezing and vaporization occur, for every gallon of water that evaporates, 7.5 gallons of water need to be frozen to balance out the heat.

The above methods can be very confusing therefore I am suggesting other methods to the homeowner.

What to do before a freeze

Move all tender plants (plants killed or severely damaged by temperatures below 32 degrees) in containers and hanging baskets into buildings where the temperature will stay above freezing. If this is not possible, group all container plants in a protected area (like the inside corner of a covered patio), and cover them with plastic. If plants are kept inside for extended periods, make sure they receive as much light as possible.

Water

If it has been dry, thoroughly watering landscape plants before a freeze may reduce the chance of freeze damage. Many times cold weather is accompanied by strong, dry winds. These winds may cause damage by drying out, and watering helps to prevent this. Wetting the foliage of plants before a freeze does not provide any cold protection.

Mulch

For plants growing in the ground, mulches can help protect them. Use a loose, dry material such as pine straw and leaves. Mulches will protect only what they cover. A mulch at the base of a bird-of-paradise will help the roots, but will provide no added protection to the leaves.

Mulches, then, are best used to protect below-ground parts, crowns, or they may be used to completely cover low-growing plants to a depth of about 4 inches. If you use a mulch as a complete cover, leave it on no more than 3 days.

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The Coyote



The coyote (*Canis latrans*) is a relative newcomer to the southeastern United States but has long been distrusted. The presence of coyotes in the United States in both urban and rural settings is becoming more common; therefore, the likelihood for human-coyote contact and conflicts is increasing. Coyotes adapt well to urban and suburban environments, and they often are considered to be the top predator in such habitats.

Coyotes are largely crepuscular, which means they are mostly active at dawn and dusk, but they may be observed at any time of the day. A coyote's home range varies based on the availability of prey, habitat, season, and whether the coyote is male or female, part of a pack or solitary, and may other factors.

Probably the most amazing aspect of coyote behavior is the variety of foods that they consume. Coyotes are opportunistic generalists and will eat almost anything. They will consume many types of vegetation, from grasses to seeds to fruits and berries. Reptiles, rodents, rabbits and many other types of small prey are their menu. They have been known to prey on poultry, cattle and occasionally domestic pets.

Due to the highly adaptive characteristics of the coyote, this species has become increasingly common in urban and suburban areas. As coyotes' presence becomes more common, it is important to understand their behavior and history. For in-depth information about the Coyote, contact the Dale County Extension Office and request publication ANR-1413– The Coyote: Facts and Myths About Living with This Wild Canid.

2-1-1 System

2-1-1 is a non-emergency phone number available to residents throughout most of Alabama. If a person needs to find local health and human services, he or she can discover that it may not be very easy. The 2-1-1– system, organized and coordinated through the United Way, simplifies the task.

According to 211.org, it “offers information on a broad range of services, including rent assistance, food banks, affordable housing, health resources, child care, after-school programs, elderly care, financial literacy, and job training programs.” The system is operational in 41 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

The 2-1-1 service in Alabama is a state-wide system with regional call centers. When you call 2-1-1, you are automatically routed to the regional center associated with your phone number. The system allows you to enter the zip code of the area in which you want to find resources. Very convenient for users who are out of the area they need!

Add this number to your list of resources– you may find it helpful for your clients, or even for yourself.

When to Prune?

Many homeowners anxiously wait out the cold months of winter for the first signs of spring. With Spring they dive back into the home landscape with zeal and pruning always seems to be one of the first jobs they tackle. But why do we prune and when is the correct time to prune? There are several reasons we prune our landscape plants and trees. We prune to cut out damaged or diseased tissue, to stimulate new growth and increase flower or fruit production, to control the size or shape of a landscape plant and we prune for aesthetics. How do we know when to prune? There is one simple rule that you can use to time your pruning efforts and it is called the May rule. If a tree or bush blooms before May prune it immediately after it has bloomed. If it blooms after May prune it prior to new growth in the spring (usually late February or early March). There are some exceptions to the May rule such as Hydrangeas and Camellias. Hydrangeas are summer bloomers but should be pruned immediately after they bloom. When you make your pruning cuts you need to take into consideration the direction of the new growth you will be stimulating and always try to prune back to a bud or lateral branch. Contact your local Alabama Cooperative Extension System Office for more information on proper pruning techniques for the landscape.



Recycling Leaves

Leaves make an excellent mulch for outdoor plants and shrubs. Whole leaves may be used, but you can reduce their volume by shredding or chopping them. Shredded leaves not only take up less space, they also make a more uniform mulch. Mulch conserves water, suppresses weeds, and moderates fluctuating soil temperatures that can disturb roots.

Leaves can also be turned into compost. Composting at home saves transportation and disposal costs and provides an environmentally sound way to manage yard waste. If you have a compost bin, fill it in the fall and keep any remaining leaves in a holding bin or in plastic bags stored near the bin. As leaves settle in the bin, add another bag or two of the remaining leaves. The settling process will go faster if some microorganisms are added to the leaves. Mix a few shovelfuls of soil or finished compost into the pile at the beginning of the process.

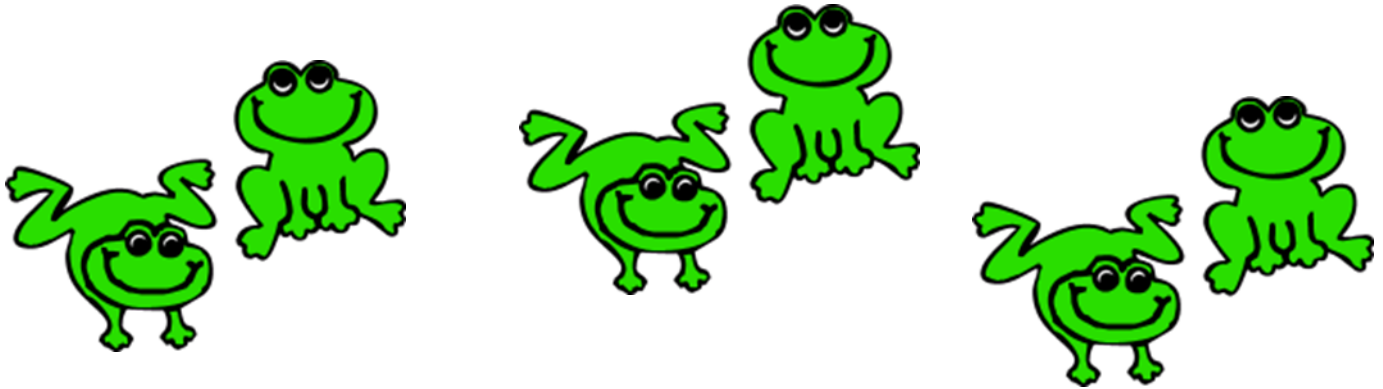
If you don't have a bin, you can create a compost heap, which is simply a free standing pile of leaves. A good, workable size for a compost heap is about 3 feet wide and 3 feet high. The length can vary according to the amount of leaves used.

A good location is helpful for a successful compost pile. The bin or pile needs good drainage, and water should be readily available. The compost pile also should not be located against wooden buildings or trees, since wood in contact with compost may decay.

A compost pile that does not need turning is one made up of nothing but leaves. It will slowly decompose in about 2 years. However, if you want to speed up the process, you can turn the pile monthly. This brings the most decomposed material at the bottom to the top of the pile. Make sure you add some water each time you turn the pile. The compost is ready to use when it is dark and crumbly like rich soil.

Pick up publication ANR—692 Recycling Leaves, ANR-794 Commonly Asked Questions About Composting and ANR-638 Backyard Composting.





Claybank Master Gardeners, Ozark, Dale County

January 11– A camellia dig was scheduled at the home of Jim and Peggy Dunn. They generously shared their plants with the CMG's in preparation for the Spring Plant Sales. An Oak Leaf Hydrangea dig is scheduled later in the month to add to the inventory of plants that will be offered by the CMG's.

February 25– The CMG's will join the Wiregrass Master Gardeners at the Dothan Area Botanical Gardens, Ricketts Hall, 10:00 a.m. to hear Dr. Doug Phillips, Host and Executive Producer of "Discovering Alabama." Dr. Phillips brings extensive knowledge of Alabama's natural features with a personal commitment to conservation and education.

March 24– Dallas Hartzog, will speak to the MGA's about growing Satsuma oranges. He has a 6 acre farm in Webb, AL where he raises Satsuma's, along with other citrus fruits and blueberries. Mr. Hartzog planted his first Satsuma 8 years ago and sold his first fruit in 2009. He says it's not unusual to harvest 150 oranges from one limb on his older tree. For all those citrus lovers in Dale County this is the program to attend.

April 21, will welcome Spring in full bloom and gardeners out and about planting their vegetable, flower and herb gardens. We will welcome Ms. Sonya Sallas, who will talk about cooking with herbs. She is a local gourmet cook and caterer. She has catered many events in the area over the past 20 years. Her specialty is cooking with herbs which she will demonstrate at a "Cooking with Sonya." program featuring some of her favorite dishes which she will invite the audience to participate. Goodies will be offered to sample and pots of herbs used in her recipes to give away. It will be an exciting event.

April TBD– Vivian B. Adams (VBA) and the Ozark Dale County Public Library (ODCPL) will be having their annual Spring Plant Sale in April, TBD. Spring Plant Sale for the ODCPL will be held on the Library grounds and VBA's will be on the school grounds. As in past years, the CMG's will bring favorite and unusual plants to the sale. This year will have lots of heirloom roses and oak leaf hydrangeas, two plants that are wildly popular.

May 19– The CMG's will have their May meeting and enjoy a picnic lunch at the Lake in Eufaula a the home of Kathy Outlaw. We will surely be inspired with such heavenly surroundings. June 23rd, Ms. Cheryl Hughes will present an amazing Sun flower program that creates a house from Sun Flowers. This program delights children and adults alike. This is a program that will teach you how to make a special garden project for your precious grandchildren or any children in your household or neighborhood. This program is a great learning exercise and promises to make lasting memories.

Coupon Clipping Tips

We all want to save money and time on our grocery bill. If you are a coupon clipper, here are some tips to follow to increase your savings:

Check all kinds of sources for coupons. The Sunday paper, on store shelves, inside or attached to products, magazines, coupons by mail, online and even text. Note: There is an annual fee for some of these on-line services. Some of these have a higher value, which equal more savings! As they say, buyers beware of what you are signing up to purchase.

There are coupon sites that give you additional information on stores that have special savings codes (such as RetailMeNot.com).

If you select to print FREE coupons, you might be asked to give your email, cell phone number or date of birth, just be mindful of who your are sharing this information with or know how it will be used.

Be aware as you might start getting up solicited phone calls or unwanted emails. Simply reply by asking them to remove your number and stop the calls or emails. Sites such as grocerycouponcart.com or couponalert.com will promote free coupon, but you will need to download software and agree to their licensing requirements. There are some sites that will have free printable sites; while other sites may even have time sensitive dates or be location specific. So be sure to read the details.

Go directly to store's websites. This might be the quickest and safest way to really save.

Watch for multiple ways to save. This simply means saving multiple times with multiple offers with just one purchase. For example, some products have a coupon on their website that you can print and save on your purchase; then cut the UPC code from the item and for every 10 you mail in you will get a free coupon for the product. Some yogurts offer this option. Participating schools get \$.30 for each label and they match the 1st \$100. So while saving money you can help your local schools out too!

Take advantage of store coupons and look for unadvertised sales. Often people do not realize that you can use a store coupon on top of a manufacturer's coupon to maximize your savings. More often than not you can actually get stuff free! Look for unadvertised specials and clearance prices while shopping. Pair them up with coupons and you will find yourself racking up the free and cheap.

Get organized. Make sure you find something that is comfortable and convenient to use to store your coupons. Use a binder for easy viewing and storage. Using envelopes with clothes pins, divided by categories can be a simple way to get started. Be organized to save time and take advantage of saving money.

Make the most of your coupons by following some of these ideas and tips:

Don't buy something just because you have a coupon. Use your food shopping list as a strategy to keep you on your budget.

Use coupons for items that are on your shopping list. For a new product, use the coupon when the item is on sale. That could be a double savings as well as a chance for your family to try out a new item.

Trade coupons with friends and family. Make it a family affair by involving your children. Ask your neighbors for their leftover coupons, too.

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Coupon Clipping Tips

4. Compare prices— another brand may be cheaper than the item with the coupon. Check unit pricing to save.
5. Check coupons for expiration dates, sizes, and amounts you can buy. If it doesn't fit your needs, save your money.
6. Some stores will accept expired coupons...it never hurts to ask.
7. Reuse envelopes to organize coupons and save time and money.
8. After checking out, check your receipt to be sure your coupons were included. There is no savings to you, if your coupon is not credited.

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Cold Weather and Protecting Plants

Covers

If plants are not too large, covering them with cardboard or Styrofoam boxes can offer protection. Larger plants can be protected by creating a simple structure and covering it with sheets, quilts or plastic. Be sure the structure holds the covering off the foliage. The cover should extend to the ground; seal with soil or other heavy objects. Plastic covers should be vented or removed on sunny warm days.

These covers will work best for light, quick freezes. For extreme prolonged cold, this is another story.

For treasured plants, you can try providing a heat source under the cover. Extreme care should be used. Most commonly a 100-watt bulb or Christmas tree lights can be placed under the cover with the plant. Be careful the bulb does not come in contact with foliage or the cover material; use outdoor approved extension cords and sockets.

Some plants can be pruned to make them more practical to cover. Hibiscus is a good example. For trees such as citrus that are too large to cover, you may at least wrap the trunk with an insulating material such as a foam rubber, pipe wrap or blankets. The top may die, but you may save the rootstock.



What to do after a Freeze

After a freeze is over, check the water needs of plants in containers and in the ground. Remove or vent plastic covers to prevent excessive heat buildup if the day is sunny. Pull mulch back that completely covered low plants.

Delay hard pruning on woody plants until new growth begins in the spring, then you can accurately determine which parts are alive and which are dead. Don't be too quick to dig up and remove plants that appear to be dead. On occasion, they may eventually resprout from the roots in April or May.

Sausage and Cheese Crescent Squares

2 cans (8 oz.) refrigerated crescent dinner rolls
1 pound spicy or mild bulk pork sausage
1 pkg. (8 oz.) cream cheese
2 cups shredded mild or sharp Cheddar cheese

Heat oven to 375 degrees.

Unroll 1 can of crescent roll dough into 2 long rectangles. Place in ungreased 13x9 glass baking dish; press over bottom and 1/2 inch up sides to form a crust.

In 12 inch skillet, cook sausage over medium heat, stirring frequently, until no longer pink. Remove sausage from skillet; discard drippings. To same skillet, add cream cheese. Cook over low heat until melted. Add cooked sausage; stir to coat. Spoon evenly over crust in baking dish. Sprinkle with cheese.

Unroll second roll of crescent rolls onto work surface. Press to form a 13x9 inch rectangle; firmly press perforations to seal. Carefully place over cheese.

Bake 21 minutes or until golden brown. Cool 15 minutes. Cut into small squares.

Hayden Sessoms
Laney 4-H Club
Ariton Elementary School
3rd Place Winner

Cream Cheese Sausage Balls

1 lb. hot sausage, uncooked 1 1/4 cups Bisquick
8 oz. cream cheese, softened 4 oz. Cheddar cheese

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Mix all ingredients until well combined. (I use my KitchenAid mixer with the dough attachment). Roll into 1-inch balls. Bake for 20–25 minutes, or until brown.

Sausage balls may be frozen uncooked. If baking frozen, add a few minutes to the baking time

Alyssa Johnson
Pate 4-H Club
Newton Elementary School
3rd Place

Lemon Filled Coconut Cake

Cake

2 1/2 stick unsalted butter, softened
4 3/4 cup flour
2 1/4 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. salt
1 3/4 cup whole milk
1 tbs. plus 1 1/2 tsp. vanilla extract
2 1/2 cup sugar
9 large egg whites



1 small bowl instant pudding mix (vanilla, lemon or coconut)
In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, salt and pudding. In small bowl, combine milk and vanilla.

In bowl of electric mixer fitted with paddle attachment, beat together butter and sugar on moderate speed until light and fluffy, about 5 minutes. Reduce speed to slow and add 1/2 of the flour mixture and beat just until combined. Add milk mixture and beat until combined. Then add remaining flour mixture and beat until combined, raise speed to moderately high and beat 10 seconds. Transfer to large bowl.

In clean bowl of electric mixer fitted with whisk attachment, beat egg whites until they hold stiff peaks. Fold 1/3 of egg whites into batter. Gently fold in remaining 2/3 of egg white until just incorporated. Divide batter between pans and smooth tops. Pour into 3 pans, greased and floured. Bake Cakes until tips are springy to touch. 30 minutes for 6 inch, 45 for 9 inch, 60 minutes for 12 inch pans. Cook Cakes in pans on racks for 30 minutes. Turn cakes onto racks to cool completely

Filing

1 small box cooked lemon pie filling. Cool and spread each layer with filling.

Frosting: Cream Cheese Icing

12 oz. Cool Whip
8 oz. cream cheese, softened
Beat all together with mixer. Frost Cake and then sprinkle top with coconut.

Kristin Godwin
Long 6th Grade 4-H Club
G. W. Long Elementary School
2nd Place

4-H Happenings

Wiregrass Outdoor Sports Day 2011

Seventeen Dale County 4-H'ers attended the 2011 Wiregrass Outdoor Sports Day which was held at Camp Alafla on November 11th. We also had eleven adults that attended the event with our Dale County group.

We started the event with a salute to our Veterans. After a short ceremony which included pledges to the American flag and the 4-H flag a day of fun activities began.

4-H'ers received instructions on archery, .22 caliber rifle and fishing. Participants attended a session on reptiles and square dancing.



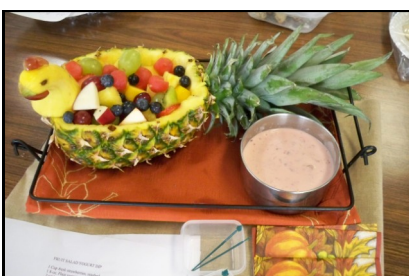
Cotton Pickin' Dip



Sweet Potato Cheese Ball



Fruit Salad Yogurt Dip



Dairy Foods Competition

This year 180 4-H'ers participated in the Dairy Foods Competition. The judges had a hard time trying to pick winners— You can see by the pictures that we had some awesome recipes submitted.

Peanut Butter Cupcakes



4-H Christmas Tree

Dale County 4-H'ers designed and created approximately 252 ornaments for the Dale County 4-H Christmas tree this year. Looks Great!



You've just started to cook when you realize you are out of one of the ingredients. You could jump in the car and head to the store or you could read Extension publication HE-585 Ingredient Substitution and Equivalent Chart first to see if you have a substitute on hand in the cabinet already. This publication will show you substitutions and equivalents that will perform the same and some that will be similar but not perform exactly the same. Use this chart for emergencies or when you don't mind a slight variation in taste or substance. Come by our office and get your copy of publication HE- 585, it just may save you a trip to town.



Alabama Cooperative Extension System

Dale County Office

202 S. Hwy 123, Suite D

Ozark, AL 36360

Phone: 334/774-2329

FAX: 334/445-1031

www.aces.edu/Dale