

# Extension Newsletter

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Dear Friends of Extension,

I would like to bid a fond farewell to a couple of our St. Clair county staff members. Fortunately, they both will continue to work for the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, just in different counties. Tonya Tomlin, 4-H Agent Assistant, accepted the position of county Extension coordinator in Clay county. Chris Thomas has been hired as our new 4-H Agent Assistant and you can read more about her in the Agent Spotlight section on page 10. Also, Tony Glover, regional Extension agent—horticulture and author of the Extension Newsletter's Gardening Corner accepted the position of county Extension coordinator in Cullman county. We wish them both the best in their new positions!

I hope you and your family have a safe, fun and happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July!

*Lee Ann Clark*

## Preparing a Grab & Go Box

Recent natural disasters have emphasized the importance of emergency preparedness. Everyone should have individual and family evacuation plans in place. Extensive planning should include all members of the family. Keep in mind that an emergency plan may be different for every family, yet there are common elements. It is critical that each family have a planned evacuation arrangement and an evacuation “grab & go” box ready for emergencies. To create a “Grab and Go” box:



⇒ **Step 1** Place papers in sealed, waterproof plastic bags and store in a durable, sealed box. (A portable, fireproof and waterproof box or waterproof backpack is recommended.)

⇒ **Step 2** Store box/backpack at home in a secure, easily accessible location.

⇒ **Step 3** If you must evacuate, grab the box and take it with you; keep the box with you at all times; and do not leave box unattended in your car.

The list of information that should be included in your grab-and-go box is extensive because it is meant to help your family rebuild if your house gets destroyed or you don't have access to it for a long period of time. Visit our website, [www.aces.edu/StClair](http://www.aces.edu/StClair), to find out more about what you should include.

*Source: Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, Louisiana State University Agricultural Center and Experiment Station*

# Grill It Safely!

To enjoy your summer, here are some checkpoints for safe grilling the next time you fire up the grill.

## Shopping

- ✓ When shopping, choose meat and poultry last, and don't put them in the trunk. The temperature is too hot and bacteria will grow rapidly. Make the grocery store your last stop—meat and poultry should not be out of refrigeration more than 2 hours or 1 hour in warm weather above 90°F. If meat and poultry sit out too long, bacteria can produce toxins that can cause illness and stay active even during cooking.
- ✓ Refrigerate meat and poultry immediately upon arriving home. Always store raw meat and poultry below other foods to prevent possible cross-contamination from their dripping. Keep your refrigerator at 40°F.
- ✓ Purchase ground meat or poultry no more than a day or two before you plan to grill it. Otherwise, freeze them. Grill larger cuts of meat, such as steaks, within 4 days of purchase or freeze them.

## Preparation

- ✓ Completely thaw meat and poultry in the refrigerator or just prior to cooking in a microwave. Frozen foods do not grill evenly and may be unsafe. Never thaw on the counter—bacteria will begin to grow. It takes about 24 hours to thaw 5 pounds of meat in the refrigerator.
- ✓ Clean up juice spills immediately so a raw product does not get on a cooked product or on foods that won't be cooked. Juice spills should be cleaned with a paper

towel or a clean dishcloth. Toss the paper towel or launder the dishcloth in hot soapy water before using it again.

- ✓ Marinate meat and poultry in the refrigerator. Sauce can be brushed on these foods while cooking, but never use the same sauce that has touched the raw product.
- ✓ Make ground beef patties about 1/2-inch thick by 4 inches in diameter (4 ounces or 4 patties per pound). This helps assure they cook thoroughly and evenly. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) advises patties this size will take 11 to 13 minutes to cook to a safe temperature of 160°F based on beef that has been removed directly from the refrigerator; cooked over medium, ash-covered coals and grilled uncovered ([www.beef.org](http://www.beef.org)). Consult your owner's manual for grilling guides for gas grills as brands vary greatly.
- ✓ Unwashed hands are a prime cause of foodborne illness. Whenever possible, wash your hands with warm, soapy water for 20 seconds before handling food. When eating away from home, pack disposable wipes for cleaning hands if no handwashing facilities are available.

## Transporting

- ✓ Transport meat and poultry to a picnic site in a cooler kept cold with ice or frozen gel packs. Pack food and cooler immediately before leaving home. Avoid frequently opening the cooler. Pack beverages in one cooler and perishable foods in another.
- ✓ Keep cooler in an air conditioned vehicle for transporting and then



keep cooler in the shade or shelter at the picnic site. Remove at one time only the amount of food that will fit on the grill. Keep raw meat and poultry wrapped separately from cooked foods, or foods to be eaten raw such as fruits and vegetables.

## Grilling

*Meat and poultry cooked on a grill often browns very fast on the outside. Use a thermometer to be sure the food has reached a safe, minimum, internal temperature.*

*Insert the thermometer in the thickest part of the food away from the bone, fat, or gristle towards the end of the cooking process.*

- ✓ Cooking is key to meat and poultry safety. If needed, scrape the grill before grilling. Heat the grill to kill microorganisms before placing meat or poultry on it.
- ✓ Cook ground beef patties to 160°F. The only way to accurately determine doneness is with a food thermometer. The color alone cannot be used to assure a hamburger has been properly cooked.

When possible, use a digital thermometer to measure the temperature of a thin food. The sensing area is only 1/2 to 1-inch long and easier to place in the center of the food.

On an “instant read” dial thermometer, the probe must be inserted in the side of the food so the entire sensing area (usually 2-3 inches) is positioned through the center of the food.

Unless a food thermometer was used to check temperature, do not eat a ground beef patty that is pink or red in the middle.

√ Ground beef patties are cooked to higher temperatures because bacteria that may have been on the outside of the meat is mixed throughout. The temperature for a

steak can be 145°F for “medium rare.” A “medium” steak is cooked to 160°F and a “well done” steak is cooked to 170°F. Use tongs or a spatula to turn steaks rather than a fork which punctures the meat and introduces bacteria into the interior of the meat.

√ Cook poultry (whole pieces or ground patties) to 165°F in the thigh.

√ If you’re preparing steaks, ground meat and/or poultry (which cook to different temperatures) at the same time, either use different thermometers or wash your thermometer between the different meats. Remember to clean thermometer probe in hot soapy water and hot rinse water before and after use.

√ Adding sauces or spices to meat may make it look brown before it

is done. Brush or sprinkle sauces/spices on the surface of cooked burgers.

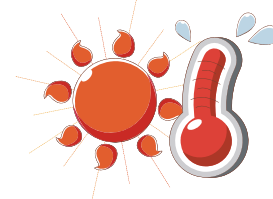
√ Cook meat and poultry completely at the picnic site. Partial cooking of foods ahead of time allows bacteria to survive and multiply to the point that subsequent cooking may not destroy them.

√ Use separate, clean tongs or spatula for removing meat or poultry from the grill and place on a clean plate to avoid cross-contamination with uncooked meat.

√ Discard any food left out for more than two hours or one hour if temperature is above 90°F. When in doubt, throw it out!

*Source: Alice Henneman, MS, RD, UNL Extension in Lancaster County and Joyce Jensen, REHS, CP-FS, Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department*

# Protecting Yourself From Heat Stress



Heat stress, from exertion or hot environments, can put you at risk for illness such as heat stroke, heat exhaustion, or heat cramps.

**What is heat stroke?** A condition that occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature, and can cause death or permanent disability.

## Symptoms

- High body temperature
- Confusion
- Loss of coordination
- Hot, dry skin or profuse sweating
- Throbbing headache
- Seizures, coma

## First Aid

- Request immediate medical assistance.
- Move to a cool, shaded area.
- Remove excess clothing and apply

cool water to person’s body.

**What is heat exhaustion?** The body’s response to an excessive loss of water and salt, usually through sweating.

## Symptoms

- Rapid heart beat
- Heavy sweating
- Extreme weakness or fatigue
- Dizziness
- Nausea, vomiting
- Irritability
- Fast, shallow breathing
- Slightly elevated temperature

## First Aid

- Rest in a cool area.
- Drink plenty of water or other cool beverages.
- Take a cool shower, bath, or sponge bath.

## Protect Yourself.

Avoid heavy exertion, extreme heat, sun exposure, and high humidity when possible. When these cannot be avoided, take the following preventative steps:

- Monitor your physical condition and that of your coworkers for signs or symptoms of heat illnesses.
- Wear light-colored, loose-fitting, breathable clothing such as cotton.
- Gradually build up to heavy work.
- Schedule heavy work during the coolest parts of the day.
- Drink water frequently. Drink enough water that you never become thirsty.
- Take more breaks when doing heavier work, and in high heat & humidity.

*Source: Department of Health & Human Services, Publication 2010-114*

# MyPlate Replaces Food Guide Pyramid



We are saying goodbye to MyPyramid and hello to MyPlate, and not a moment too soon according to most consumers. On June 2<sup>nd</sup> the USDA introduced MyPlate as its new healthy eating symbol.

Replacing the MyPyramid symbol, which had proven to be too complex for Americans to follow easily, MyPlate is simply a visual reminder of what a healthy meal should include. It should be very simple for us to look at our plate of food at mealtime and see if it looks similar to the plate in the Choose MyPlate graphic.

A healthy lunch or dinner plate should include the recommended serving sizes of fruits, vegetables, grains, protein and low-fat dairy products. Number of servings recommended depend on the age, gender and activity level of the individual. Portion control will always be an important key to healthy eating.

In general, recommended serving sizes are:

- Fruits and vegetables – ½ cup
- Meat, poultry and fish – 3 oz. (approximately the size of a deck of cards)
- Grains – 1 oz. (1 slice of bread or ½ cup of rice or pasta)
- Dairy – 8 oz. or 1 cup of milk

One-half of our plate should consist of fruits and vegetables, one-fourth filled with grains and one-fourth with proteins. One serving of a low-fat dairy food should also be included. Incidentally, since the plates in

contemporary dinnerware are usually very large, many of us should not fill the entire plate with food, but fit it on a nine-inch diameter inside the plate, or when using a large plate just remember that there should be space between the foods.

Following MyPlate recommendations may present a challenge when we have to eat on the run. When we eat from a bag instead of a plate, it is easy to consume too much food. One suggestion is to spread the food out on the sandwich wrapper and visualize what it would look like on a nine-inch plate. Substituting a small salad for fries is one way to increase fruit and vegetable consumption and trim calories from a fast food meal.

In order to meet requirements for dietary fiber, USDA recommends that at least one-half of our grains consist of products containing whole grains. Even though fat and sugar are not mentioned on the new graphic, it is best to prepare foods without large amounts of added fat or sugar – most of the time.

MyPlate is based on recommendations from the recently-released 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Tips for helping Americans build healthier diets include:

- Enjoy your food, but eat less.
- Avoid oversized portions.
- Increase consumption of fruits and vegetables.
- Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk.
- Make at least half your grains whole grains.

- Limit foods with high sodium content by comparing sodium content in foods like soups, bread and frozen meals.
- Drink water instead of sugary drinks.

For those wanting more in-depth information on healthy eating recommendations, MyPlate comes with its own website. Just visit [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov). The web site provides individualized information on amounts of food needed based on age, gender and activity level. It also has suggested menu plans, recipes and much more. More features will be added to the site in the near future.

As a part of this new initiative, USDA wants to see how consumers are putting MyPlate into action by encouraging them to take a photo of their plates and share on Twitter with the hash-tag #MyPlate, or post photos at <http://www.flickr.com/people/usdagov/>

It seems that we are bombarded with nutrition messages these days. Unfortunately, not all of that information is reliable and it is difficult for many people to focus on changes that will have a real impact on weight and health. MyPlate provides all the information we need to make positive changes in our eating habits. All we have to do is apply the information and put it into action in our lives.

*Source: Shirley Whitten, Regional Extension Agent, Human Nutrition, Diet & Health*

# July: National Berries Month

July is the month known as National Berries Month because so many berry holidays represent the month of July. This includes everything from blackberries to blueberries to raspberries. Berries are bursting with vitamins and minerals, many of which are classified as antioxidants. Researchers from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that blueberries, cranberries, blackberries, raspberries, and strawberries were among the top 11 foods for antioxidant activity. Antioxidants may help increase our immune function and protect against cancer and heart disease. Check out these tips to increase your berry consumption.

## Tips on how to include more berries in your diet:

### Add berries to the foods you already eat.

- Try adding sliced strawberries to a bowl of whole grain cereal, stir raspberries into vanilla yogurt, or sprinkle blueberries on a salad.
- If you like to grill, try making fruit kabobs that incorporate berries with other fruits such as pineapple

chunks, bananas and grapes.

- If you like ice cream, try cutting your portion size in half and add different berries to make your cool treat higher in fiber, vitamins, and minerals.

### Keep berries on hand in different forms.

- Most berries are naturally sweet and require little effort to prepare.
- They do not always have to be fresh; you can keep a variety on hand in frozen form to throw in yogurt or smoothies! Blend fat-free or low-fat milk or yogurt with fresh or frozen fruit for a smoothie.
- Dried fruit is a great alternative to keep in your desk or bag. Often you can find dried cranberries and blueberries.

### What to look for when shopping.

- Avoid buying bruised or oozing berries, and make sure you turn the container over to check berries at the bottom.



- Look for firm, plump, full-colored berries. At home, cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.
- Wash fruits before preparing or eating. Under clean, running water, rub fruits briskly with your hands and dry after.

Make July fun and nutritious by celebrating National Berries Month and adding more berries to your diet. Make it a point to find different ways berries can be used in cooking. Remember to be brave and broaden your food horizons, you never know if you will like something unless you try it!

*Source: Lisa Franzen-Castle, PhD, RD, Extension Nutrition Specialist, University of Nebraska Lincoln: Panhandle Research & Extension Center*

## Drought Will Bring Fall Army Worms

Farmers and homeowners across St. Clair County should be on the lookout for fall armyworms. Typically a problem in dry years, the fall armyworm can begin to infest the area in July; sometimes earlier. Fall armyworms feed on a variety of forages but prefer lush, green, well-fertilized bermudagrass. They are typically most active early in the morning, late in the afternoon or in early evening, but on taller, un-mowed grass, they can be observed feeding on foliage throughout the day. On closely grazed or recently mowed hayfields, fall armyworm larvae spend the warmer hours of the day deep in the sod. Fall armyworm damage often seems to appear “overnight.” Young armyworms don’t eat much. Almost all the damage is caused by the oldest caterpillars which eat more than all the other ages put together. Therefore, an infestation may have been present but not detected because of the small size of the caterpillars. If you believe you have fall armyworms call the St. Clair County Extension office at (205) 338-9416 for control recommendations. You may also visit [www.aces.edu/StClair](http://www.aces.edu/StClair) and click on publications at the top to look up *ANR-1019 Management of Fall Armyworm in Pastures and Hayfields* or *ANR-0172 Controlling Fall Armyworms on Lawns & Turf*.



*Source: Henry Dorough, Regional Extension Agent, Animal Science and Forages*

# You Too Can Become a Coupon Queen

Do you cut out coupons and never use them? Do you organize your coupons inside a pocket of your handbag? Do you save coupons on your window sill and find them again months after they have expired? If you answered yes to any of these questions, chances are you are a Coupon Klutz. But do not despair. By making a few changes you can be on the road to becoming the next Coupon Queen.

If you save coupons chances are you have seen articles about the shopper that bought three grocery carts full of food and paid under \$50 for it all. Do you ever wonder how those people do it? For one thing, those who accomplish such miraculous coupon success are what we refer to as Coupon Queens and chances are they spend a lot of time perfecting their skills.

If you do not have a lot of time to devote to couponing, you can still advance your skills by adding just a few strategic steps to your collecting process. Will you have the success that the real Queens have? It is possible!

## Shop at Stores That Double Coupons

If you do not have a store in your area that doubles coupons it may be worth it to organize a shopping day in a town nearby that does have such a store. Buddy-up with a friend and make the trip together. Two eyes are better than one and your friend may spot a deal that you may miss.

## Learn To Spot When Generic is Better

Generic food products are made at the same companies that produce many of your favorite brand-name products. The packaging is all that is lacking. By pulling out your calculator and adding up the difference in using your coupon for a brand-name item versus buying generic, you will quickly figure out what direction will save you the most money. Remember, just because you have a coupon does not mean you have to use it. Always use the method that will save you the most.

**Double-Up Your Savings** Combining your coupon with other promotions going on in the store will save you a bundle. If you have a shopper's card, look for those items that you have a coupon for that are also discounted with your shopper's card. Double-up on 2-for sales, such as two cans of soup for a discounted price, plus your coupon. This is also an excellent time to use the coupons that specify that you save only when you buy two of the same product. Always shop with the grocery store printouts of what is on sale so that you don't miss any of the super buys.

**Save and Trade** Save all coupons, even those you do not need, and begin trading with friends and relatives. To find others interested in trading in your area, check the classified section of the paper. Also, do not be afraid of proposing the idea to any groups that you belong to or start a group and see if your local library will sponsor meeting times. Meeting one evening every two weeks for a few hours should not be too over demanding for a busy schedule.

**Keep It Organized** Keep your coupons organized. Everyone seems to have a slightly different approach to how to accomplish such a task. The best approach is to come up with your own then stick to it. Being consistent in how you file your coupons is the most important piece of the coupon organizational puzzle. If you keep switching your method you risk forgetting where things are when you are pushed for time at the grocery store.

**Plan Your Menu** Menu planning will help you use the coupons that you have before they go out of date. I have planned many a week's meals based on what products I have coupons for and the savings is always substantial.

**Know What Is On Sale** Know what the grocery stores are offering on a weekly basis. Either subscribe to your local paper or pick up the paper on the day that generally offers grocery store



inserts. You do not want to miss capitalizing on using coupons on your favorite items that may be on special nor do you want to miss a special triple-coupon promotion. The Sunday paper generally carries food coupons and the Thursday paper will carry grocery store inserts, but check your local paper to make sure those days are the same where you live.

By planning out your weekly menu in advance, setting aside ample time to do the grocery shopping, and keeping your coupons organized so you can get to them quickly, you will be able to maximize your coupon potential and make leaps and bounds down the grocery aisle to becoming a Coupon Queen.

If you are interested in learning how to better utilize your coupons, please make plans to attend a workshop that is being offered by the St. Clair County Extension office. The workshop will be held on **Thursday, September 22<sup>nd</sup> from 6—8 p.m. at the Pell City Civic Center.** Cost to attend the class is \$5. You must pre-register to attend no later than September 15<sup>th</sup>. Class size is limited to 50. For more information please contact the Extension office at 205-338-9416. To download a registration form visit [www.aces.edu/StClair](http://www.aces.edu/StClair) or stop by the Extension office located on the lower level of the St. Clair County Courthouse in Pell City to register. The program will be presented by Regional Extension Agent, Angela Treadaway.

*Source: Angela Treadaway, Regional Extension Agent, Food Safety, Preservation and Preparation*

# Let Pocket Meals Work for You

Pocket meals are the busy cooks best secret. It represents healthy cooking in its simplest form. Basically, you are wrapping food in a piece of foil and allowing steam to cook the food over hot coals, a grill, or your oven. The meal possibilities are endless, and there is little cleanup. However, there are some simple techniques to keep in mind to ensure your meals turn out right.

First of all, you will want to use heavy duty foil, or double up on regular foil to ensure that the foil doesn't break over hot coals or leak your marinades. Next, spray one side of the foil with cooking spray or brush lightly with oil. It doesn't make a difference which side of the foil touches your food. The shiny side is created by the steel rollers as the foil is manufactured. However, if you are using non-stick tin foil, there is a special coating applied to the dull side. In this case the dull side should touch the food.

Next, always place meat on the bottom of the foil because it takes the longest to cook. You may want to pound or cut thicker cuts of meat to about ½ of an inch thick to facilitate cooking. Hard raw vegetables such as carrots and potatoes also take a long time to cook so it's best to cut them into smaller pieces or use the canned variety if you don't want to wait. When cooking meat, it's also a good idea to add a few high moisture veggies like tomatoes and onions to keep the meat from drying out and add great flavor. Onions will cook fast so tuck them between meat and potatoes.

There are several types of pocket meals depending on what you're cooking. The "flat pack" is better for

foods like meat where you want more browning than steaming. Tear off a sheet of heavy-duty foil that is about twice as long as the food you'll be wrapping. Simply place the food in the middle of the foil. Bring the long sides together in the center and crease them together, making tight folds until the foil is flat next to the food. Finally, tightly roll up the shorter sides until they meet the food.

The next type of pocket meal is called the "tent pack." The tent pack provides a pocket of air that allows for greater steaming. This type is better for foods you want to steam such as fruits, vegetables, and meat/vegetable combos. First, tear off a sheet just as you would for the flat pack and place the food in the middle of the foil. Next, bring the long sides together in the center and tightly fold them together toward the food. This time stop folding a few inches before you get to the food, leaving a pocket of space and creating a "tent." Tightly roll up the shorter sides, again leaving an inch or so of space between the end of the fold and the food.

Cooking times depend on how hot your fire is and the type of food you are cooking. Cooking times range from 10 minutes per side to 20 minutes, for a total time of 20-40 minutes. Green, yellow and red vegetables cook faster than meat, potatoes or carrots. You may want to cook these vegetables separately as they only take about 8-10 minutes per side. Sliced fruits and berries cook quickly (approx. 7 minutes per side).

Cook your foil packet on the fire's coals, not the fire itself. A bed of coals about 2 inches thick works best. Flip



the packets over a few times during cooking. Open your foil packet carefully away from your face as it is full of hot steam. If you are placing your meal packets on a baking sheet, bake at 450 degrees for approximately 20-25 minutes, turning once half-way through the cooking time.

A meal pocket can be as easy as slicing squash and zucchini in half and marinating with a little olive oil, garlic, salt and pepper. You can experiment with BBQ sauce, salsa, soy sauce, teriyaki, mustard, Italian dressing, broth and more. If adding a liquid, fold all but the last side of your packet. Then pour the liquid, and seal tight.

Pocket meals are great for camping, outdoor summer grilling or a simple week day meal. I encourage you to experiment with herbs and spices as well. With a little practice, you will be preparing simple healthy meals with ease.

For more information about nutrition please contact Jennifer Dutton, regional Extension agent—human nutrition, diet and health at the St. Clair County Extension office at (205) 338-9416 or email [jld0021@aces.edu](mailto:jld0021@aces.edu)

*Source: Jennifer Dutton, regional Extension agent, human nutrition, diet and health*

# The Gardening Corner

*By: Sallie Lee , Urban Regional Extension Agent*

*Home Grounds, Gardens & Home Pests*



## What is “DE?”

**Question:** I’ve been hearing gardeners talk about something called “DE,” a mechanical insecticide that is less toxic than many others. What exactly is this product, where can I find it, and what is the benefit of using it?

**Answer:** DE is the abbreviation for Diatomaceous Earth (pronounced die-uh-toe-**may**-shus) which isn’t really dirt or earth. DE is an all-natural product made from tiny, fossilized water plants. These plants have been around since prehistoric times; scientists surmise that 30 million years ago diatoms built up deposits of diatomite, which are mined and ground into a material that looks and feels like talcum powder to humans. However, its use is not as a powder, but rather as a mineral-based pesticide that is 3% magnesium, 33% silicon (also an ingredient in glass), 19% calcium, plus sodium, iron, and several other trace elements.

Historically, Alfred Nobel found that by adding diatomite to nitroglycerin, transporting the highly combustible material was made much safer. In fact, Mr. Nobel patented the mixture in 1876, which was also referred to as “guhr” dynamite.

DE is currently used as a filtration aid, a mild abrasive, mechanical insecticide, cat litter, and an activator in blood clotting studies. Its heat resistant nature also makes it useful as a thermal insulator.

As you might suspect, there are a couple of forms of DE, one of which is used in greenhouses, homes, gardens, and with all types of plants. “Pool grade” diatomaceous earth is heat-treated, causing it to take on a crystalline form and used for pool filters: it should **not** be used for pest control.

DE in its agricultural-use form is a lethal dust with microscopic razor sharp edges, which cut through an insect’s protective covering, desiccating and killing it. DE is either dusted on, applied as a wettable powder

(WP) spray, or fed to insects in which case it shreds their insides. Bottom line, humans are not affected or harmed by Diatomaceous Earth, although inhalation isn’t recommended.

DE can be used as a barrier to control snails, slugs, ants, and silverfish. It is suggested for use in controlling carpet beetles, bedbugs, fleas, flies, and fly larva. One example of using DE for bedbugs recommends: ‘take apart the bed, dust joints and channels, any hollow tubing, the interior framework as well as the mattress. Don’t stop there – dust all cracks and crevices in the room with DE.’

For control of pests in the garden, such as snails, slugs, ants, fleas, and beetles sprinkle DE in bands around the plant or plants that are under attack or spray it on foliage.

DE is nontoxic to humans and animals; there is no buildup of tolerance to using it as there can be with chemicals because the method of control is physical.

In fact, DE is used in toothpaste and for filtering beer, and is considered beneficial to the soil as it contains several trace elements. However, be careful when applying DE, especially if applying large amounts outdoors. It is powdery fine, like dust, and can cause problems if large quantities are inhaled. A good-quality dust mask and staying up-wind of out-door applications are recommended.

Also keep in mind that DE can kill beneficial insects as well as pests, so use with caution and according to label directions.

DE can usually be purchased at nurseries and retail outlets. Be sure to purchase agricultural or even food grade DE; not “pool grade” which has a different formulation and use. If you need more information, please contact the Extension office.

# Tips for Watering Thirsty Lawns

Turfgrasses, like all plants, require water for growth and survival. Without significant rainfall, home lawns must be supplied water through irrigation. The most efficient way to irrigate or water a lawn is to apply water only when the lawn starts to show signs of drought stress from the lack of moisture. There are several ways to help determine when this time has come.

One of the first signs of drought stress is if the color of the turfgrass turns from green to bluish-gray to even a white cast. Another indication is the “footprints” on the turfgrass. If you walk across your lawn late in the afternoon, look behind you and see if your steps have left any footprints. If so, the lawn may need watering. When your feet compress the leaf blades of the turfgrass, the low water levels in the plant tissues prevent the leaf blades from recovering, or “springing” back up, after being pushed down. If the footprints remain for an extended period of time, water the lawn to prevent the turfgrass from turning brown and becoming dormant.

The visual condition of the turfgrass blades can also be used to evaluate drought stress. Turfgrass blades respond to drought stress by folding, rolling, and/or wilting. Another means of evaluating drought stress on a lawn is the “screwdriver” test. To do this test, push a screwdriver down through the lawn and into the soil. If the soil is very dry, it will be difficult to push the screwdriver down into the ground. Use this screwdriver test to confirm the results of the other visual indicators

above to help determine when a lawn should be watered.

If your lawn exhibits the visual symptoms of drought stress, apply about 1/2 to 1 inch of water, which will moisten the soil to a depth of 4 to 6 inches, depending on the soil type and degree of soil compaction. Then, after watering, use the screwdriver test to determine the depth of water penetration. This will prove valuable in the future in determining how much water should be applied.



Unless the lawn has received a significant amount of rain lately, as a general rule, apply about one inch of water per week. Increase the amount to 1 1/2 during severe dry periods. And it is also best to divide the irrigation time into two 1/2-inch applications per week. Frequent watering only encourages shallow rooting of the turfgrass plants, making the lawn less drought-tolerant. When watering, avoid applying water to the point of runoff. Allow the water to soak into the lawn and soil. If needed, apply less water and allow it to soak in before continuing with the watering process. The best time of day to irrigate or water is early in the morning because it minimizes the potential for water loss through

evaporation. Watering at night is not a good practice because it can promote various lawn fungal diseases and lead to damaged lawns.

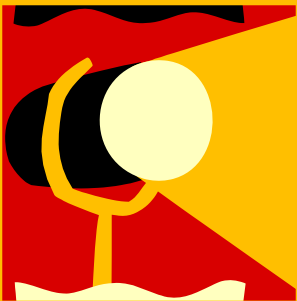
Automated irrigation systems are nice but can have flaws. Check to be sure your system is working properly and is applying the correct amount of water of one inch per week. Irrigation systems should be set or manually turned on twice per week in the early morning hours to meet this need. However, if significant rainfall has fallen for the week, then turn off those automated timed irrigation systems so water is not wasted.

Once you have watered the lawn, do not water again until you observe similar drought stress symptoms. Never water a lawn every day except during the establishment phase or renovation. Properly watering equals a happy and healthy lawn. Be good stewards of our drinking water and demand others to do the same.

*Source: Shane Harris, County Extension Coordinator, Tallapoosa County*

**Gardening Questions?**  
**Call the Master Gardener**  
**Horticulture Hotline**  
**1-877-252-4769**  
**St. Clair Co is Option #5**

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# Agent Spotlight

## Chris Thomas

### 4-H Agent Assistant



Chris Thomas joined the Alabama Cooperative Extension System's (ACES) St. Clair county office on June 1, 2011. Previously she has worked for Social Security and the U. S. Census as well as Liberty National Life Insurance and First Real Estate. She has worked with the Girl Scouts for ten years and was a Sunday school teacher for thirteen years. Over the years she has volunteered for many school and church activities while being a homemaker and raising her children.

Chris is an Alabama native and currently lives in Pell City. She graduated from Woodlawn High School in Birmingham and recently has been attending Jefferson State Community College through their Distance Learning Program. She only lacks three courses in order to complete a two-year degree in Computerized Accounting.

Chris and her husband, Jim, have three grown children; her daughter Kathryn lives in Seattle, Washington and Robyn lives in Denver, Colorado, and their son, James, lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. While away from her job she enjoys reading and gardening, although recently with school she has not had as much time for these activities as she would like. She also enjoys crafts, especially crocheting, cross-stitching, beading and others as well as researching genealogy with her sister. Her favorite activity is spending time with her children and family.

Chris is very excited about working with the county's 4-H program. She believes that 4-H makes learning fun and helps develop relationships, character, and leadership. Through the program she looks forward to bringing new experiences to our youth and an awareness of opportunities that await them regardless of where their interest lies. For more information about the 4-H program please contact Chris at (205) 338-9416 or email her at [mcl0018@auburn.edu](mailto:mcl0018@auburn.edu). She will be happy to assist you.



## Grandma Maddox's Peach Cobbler

*This is one of my favorite recipes! My grandma Maddox always made the BEST peach cobbler! It's so easy and absolutely delicious, especially when you use fresh, summer fruit. Serve with a scoop of vanilla bean ice cream for a special treat! Hope you enjoy it as much as I do!*

1 stick margarine

1 cup sugar

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

2 Tablespoons baking powder

1/2 teaspoon salt

pinch baking soda

1 1/3 cups water

1 large can peaches, drained (or about 4 cups fresh, sliced peaches)

Cinnamon and sugar to taste

Preheat oven to 375°F. Melt margarine in 9 x 13-inch baking dish. Mix dry ingredients together and add water to make a paste. Pour paste on top of melted margarine. Sprinkle fruit and a little cinnamon and sugar on top of paste mixture. Bake 45 minutes to 1 hour. Other fruits like blackberries, blueberries or strawberries can be substituted for the peaches. *Note: If using fresh fruit, you may need to sweeten to taste if fruit is tart.*

# Friend of 4-H Award

Mr. Jeff Rowlen



St. Clair County 4-H is proud to announce Mr. Jeff Rowlen as this issue's winner of the *Friend of 4-H Award* in recognition of his outstanding volunteer service.

Jeff started volunteering in St. Clair County in 2006 when he started the 4-H Horse Club. He believes that 4-H is important today more than ever because it teaches young people skills that they can't get many places and preserves these skills for the future. He also jokingly added that "it doesn't involve electronics." Jeff enjoys seeing the kids who participate go from not having a clue to being self reliant with their animals.

*Nancy Graves presents award to Mr. Rowlen* Jeff is originally from Birmingham but his mother is from south Alabama, which he refers to as "farm country." He visited this area often and in 2003 he and his wife Holly and children Joanna and Daniel moved to the country, and now live on Pine Mountain, which is located between Oneonta and Springville. Jeff has a B.S. degree in Criminal Justice from UAB and currently works as a Firefighter with the city of Birmingham. His hobbies include working with his own horse, a Paso Fino named Celestial Estrellita (Sister) and providing for his kid's hobbies, which for Joanna is her horse and Daniel, his vintage Camaro.

He has enjoyed working with the St. Clair County 4-H Horse Club and says sarcastically that he will miss spending his vacations in Montgomery in the 100°+ heat. All kidding aside, he admits that he has really had a lot of fun at the state horse shows since 2004. Since his daughter, Joanna, ages out of 4-H this year he plans to step aside. He says the club has grown dramatically over the last 5 years and knows he will be leaving it in the capable hands of several devoted parents and new leaders.

Congratulations Jeff for the countless hours you have dedicated to St. Clair County 4-H! If you would like to be a 4-H volunteer or nominate someone for this award, please contact the St. Clair County Extension office at (205) 338-9416.



## Master Gardener Association Update

The St. Clair County Master Gardeners have been busy this spring trying to complete an outdoor classroom at Moody High School, in spite of the weather. They have also started a new project at the A.R.C. in Chula Vista. The residents there want to grow some of their own food and to learn more about lasagna gardening in raised beds.

The Master Gardeners held their annual Spring Plant Sale on May 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> in Moody. Proceeds will be used to benefit community service projects. In the midst of all this activity, four Master Gardeners took time to attend the state Master Gardener Association meeting that was held in Mobile. Frank and Patricia Peoples, Don Patterson and Nola Shiflett all enjoyed the convention and look forward to sharing the new information that they learned. Frank, Patricia and Nola also stayed an extra day after the state meeting in order to tour beautiful Bellingrath Gardens in Theodore, Alabama. For more information about the Master Gardener program visit [www.aces.edu/mg](http://www.aces.edu/mg)

*Submitted by: Nola Shiflett, St. Clair County Master Gardener*



# Mark Your Calendar for these Upcoming Workshops

- **Rain Barrel Workshop** Are you worried about how to water your garden this summer? Do you want to take advantage of rainfall that will be coming this fall? Then you may want to consider attending this workshop. Cost is \$30 per person and includes lunch, resources and a rain barrel. It will be held Friday, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 10 a.m.—2 p.m. at the Pell City Civic Center.
- **Backyard Poultry Workshop** A workshop for beginners who either have a few chickens and want to learn more, or those who have considered raising a few chickens and want help getting started. Topics covered include: housing, breed types, feeding and flock management, disease issues and biosecurity. Cost is \$5 and includes resources and refreshments; Friday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 9:30 —11:30 a.m.; Pell City Civic Center.
- **Food Preservation Workshop** Come learn the most up-to-date recommendations for preserving fresh fruits and vegetables. Workshop is FREE and will be held on Monday, July 25<sup>th</sup>, 6—8 p.m. at the Pell City Civic Center.
- **Couponing 101 Workshop** Want to learn how to better organize and put those coupons to good use? You can save as much as 50% off your grocery bill. Cost to attend is \$5 and includes resources and refreshments. The workshop will be held on Thursday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 6—8 p.m. at the Pell City Civic Center

*For more information, please contact the St. Clair County Extension office at (205) 338-9416.*

*All workshops require pre-registration and registration forms are available on our website, [www.aces.edu/StClair](http://www.aces.edu/StClair).*

*Don't delay, send in your registration today!*



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