



*Raising Kids, Eating Right,
Spending Smart, Living Well*

Alabama Cooperative Extension System
St. Clair County Office

Extension Newsletter

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Dear Friends of Extension,

March is a great time to think green! Most of us think about this beautiful color in March because of St. Patrick's Day and we all know that it is definitely the color of Spring. For those of you who already have a case of Spring fever, you're in luck! I've included lots of tips and resources in this issue to give you a head start on the season.

National Nutrition Month®, a time when we are encouraged to eat healthier, especially those tasty green fruits and vegetables, is also celebrated in March. Speaking of green, have you heard the latest buzz about going green? A great place to start is at the grocery store. Look for tips on page 5 to see how you can save some green by going green with your grocery shopping.

Happy Spring!

Smart Uses for Your Tax Refund

New computer? New recliner? Nice vacation? Those are all great ideas. But before you spend the money, try to think through all options—even the ones that aren't especially exciting or glamorous. Consider three general rules:

- **DO** plan ahead before spending your refund. Without a plan, you may use the money on the first important thing that comes to mind, and then later realize something else was more important. Planning ahead and involving the family increases the chances you will identify all the possibilities, and think about which are most important.
- **DO** devote a portion of your tax refund to build long-term financial security.
- **DON'T** throw away part of your refund on loan fees. Did you know that companies that offer "quick refunds" are just giving you a loan? It's a high-cost, high-risk loan.

Build a year-long habit!

It feels great to make good use of your tax refund. You can experience that same sense of accomplishment all year 'round!

Tax refund season is not your only opportunity to make financial progress toward your goals. Every week you have opportunities to improve your financial well-being. If you don't think you can come up with any extra money each month, look again. You may be able to plug a few spending leaks and "find" some money!

Once you've found some extra funds, you can use the money to: keep bills paid, pay off debt early, build financial security, and keep saving for retirement, college, or something else—even a little bit makes a difference!

Source: 2008 Iowa State University Extension/Iowa State University



Help Yourself to a Healthy Home

Part 6—Asthma & Allergies

More than eight million children in the United States have a disease called *asthma*. Asthma is a leading reason that children miss school or end up in the hospital. Asthma makes it hard for people to breathe. Sometimes people even die from asthma. This disease has no cure yet, but it can be controlled.

Another 40 to 50 million people have allergies. Allergies can also make it hard for people to breathe by causing an asthma attack. An allergy is an unusual reaction to something, like a food or a plant, that is normally harmless. Common signs of allergies are a stuffy or runny nose, itching, or a rash. This section will help you ask the right questions to find out how to make your home a safer, healthier place for people with asthma or allergies.

What Happens During an Asthma Attack?

Asthma flare-ups are called asthma attacks. During an attack, the breathing tubes in your lungs, called *bronchi* and *bronchioles*, get smaller. During an asthma attack:

- The breathing tubes in your lungs swell up.
- The muscles around these tubes tighten.
- The tubes make large amounts of a thick fluid called mucus.

You cannot catch asthma. It does run in families, though. If someone in your family has it, you or your children may too. The number of asthma cases is growing and more people die from it every year. These deaths do not need to happen.

Warning Signs of an Asthma Attack:

- Tightness in the chest
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Coughing

People with asthma who learn to spot the early signs of an attack can take medicine right away. This may make the attack less severe.

The most important thing to know about asthma is that you can control it. Asthma patients (or their parents) who learn what medicine to take and what triggers attacks can avoid them most of the time. That means people with asthma can lead normal lives.

Many types of medicine can treat asthma. Keep in mind that no one medicine works best for everyone. You and your doctor have to work together to find the best medicine. Remember, it may take a while to find just the right kinds. Also, you must take the time to find out what sets off an attack.

If someone is having a severe asthma attack, get him or her to a hospital emergency room right away. Some signs of a severe attack:

- The person's *asthma rescue* or *inhaler medicine* doesn't help within 15 minutes;
- The person's lips or fingernails are blue;
- The person's lips or fingernails are blue;
- The person has trouble walking or talking due to shortness of breath.

Questions to Ask

Asthma Triggers

No one knows what causes asthma. Lots of things set off asthma attacks, though. These things are called *triggers*. Some people have only one or two triggers. Other people have many.

Some triggers are things to which people are often allergic. Common ones are *pollen* (from trees and flowers) and *dander* (skin flakes from cats, dogs, and other pets). Also, some people are allergic to pests such as roaches, rodents, or *dust mites*. Dust mites are tiny insects that you can't see. They live everywhere—in carpets, upholstered furniture, stuffed animals, and bedding. *Cigarette smoke* is another common trigger of asthma attacks. Other triggers have nothing to do with allergies—cold weather, exercise, and strong feelings (laughing, crying).

Other Common Asthma Triggers

- Dust
- Mold
- Carbon monoxide
- Cleaning products like furniture polish or dusting sprays
- Personal care products like hair spray or perfume
- Flu, colds

Allergies

Common signs of allergies include a runny or stuffy nose, coughing, hives, itching, a rash, or puffy eyes. Allergies can be deadly for some people. When sensitive people come in contact with something they're very allergic to, like peanuts, their blood pressure drops, their breathing tubes swell up, and they can die from lack of air. The good news is that allergies can be treated. If you have allergies, it's important to find out what causes them and how to take care of them. A doctor can test you to find out. People with severe allergies may need to carry emergency medicine.

Common Allergens

An *allergen* is something that causes allergy signs, or an *allergic reaction*. Many asthma triggers also cause allergic reactions in people who don't have asthma. There are many other allergens too. Some common ones are listed here. It's important to talk to your doctor if you have had a reaction to any of these:

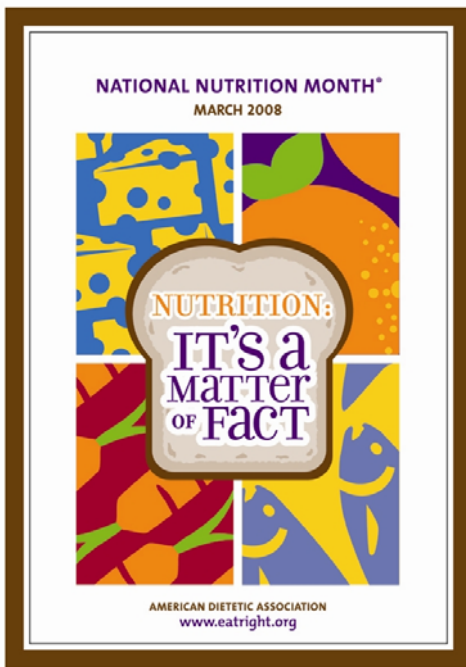
- **Foods:** milk and dairy products, citrus fruit like oranges and lemons, artificial colors and flavors, nuts, and shellfish like shrimp and clams.
- **Medicines:** penicillin, some heart medicines, and some anti-seizure medicines.
- **Insect stings and bites:** most are caused by yellow jackets, honeybees, paper wasps, hornets, and fire ants. In some people, reactions to stings become more serious as years go by. Eventually, only one sting may kill you. Talk to your doctor if you have had a serious reaction to a sting.
- **Contact allergens:** cause reactions when things like plants, cosmetics, jewelry, or latex (a type of rubber) touch the skin. Rashes are common reactions to these allergens.

- Does anyone in your family have asthma or allergies?
- Does anyone in your family notice burning eyes, coughing, or sneezing that happens most often at home?
- Does your home have carpet that is not cleaned well or not cleaned often?
- Do you have carpeting, stuffed toys, or fleecy materials in bedrooms?
- How often do you wash sheets, blankets, and other bedding?
- Do you store food in containers or boxes that don't have covers?
- Do you keep pets inside?
- Has it been more than a year since you had your furnace, flues, and chimneys inspected and cleaned?
- Does anyone smoke inside your home?
- Is your home damp or musty?

Action Steps

- **Pay Attention to Your Asthma and Allergies** Know what triggers you or your children's asthma or allergies.
- **Healthy Housekeeping** Clean your home often. Keep clutter down. When possible, don't have carpeting or rugs.
- **Keep Down Dust Mites** Wash bedding, including blankets, pillow covers, and mattress pads in hot water every week. Temperatures above 130° F kill dust mites.
- **Control Other Pests** Roaches and rodents can trigger asthma and allergies. You can control them by making things hard to get.
- **Pets** Furry pets like dogs, cats, and gerbils can cause asthma and allergy attacks because of their saliva and skin flakes. It is best to either not have pets or keep them outside.
- **Check Your Appliances** Make sure your gas appliances and fireplace, furnace, or wood-burning stove have yearly checkups to keep down soot. Check the filter on your furnace and air conditioner a couple of times a year. Change when needed.
- **Smoking** Cigarette, cigar, and pipe smoke causes health problems, especially for people with asthma. It is best to quit smoking. Otherwise, smoke outside and away from children. Don't light up in your car because smoke will linger there and affect children.
- **Mold** When people breathe in mold, it can cause allergies and asthma to act up. Mold needs water to grow. Keep your home dry to control mold. That will also help with roaches and dust mites.

Source: HE-838: Help Yourself to a Healthy Home



Nutrition: Fact vs. Fiction

March is National Nutrition Month® and the American Dietetic Association urges consumers to look beyond the myths of nutrition and focus on the facts. Remember, the theme for 2008 is *Nutrition: It's a Matter of Fact*.

It has never been easy to sort through the facts and fallacies about food; and marketing ploys, clever phrases, wishful thinking, pseudo-science, media hype and celebrity testimonials don't help. Here are some common and enduring food myths:

MYTH: Fresh fruits and vegetables are healthier than frozen or canned.

FACT: Research shows frozen and canned foods are as nutritious as fresh. In fact, since lycopene is more easily absorbed in the body after it has been processed, canned tomatoes, corn and carrots are sometimes better nutrition choices.

MYTH: Body weight is a reliable indicator of a healthful diet.

FACT: No two people have the same body composition. The measure of a person's diet and your overall health is a combination of factors, including weight.

MYTH: Eating carbohydrates causes weight gain.

FACT: Calories cause weight gain. Excess carbohydrates are no more fattening than calories from any source. Despite claims of low-carb diet books, a high carbohydrate diet does not promote fat storage by enhancing insulin resistance.

MYTH: Eating just before bedtime is fattening.

FACT: What you eat, not when, makes the difference; calories have the same effects on the body no matter when they are consumed. Evidence does suggest that eating regular meals, especially breakfast, helps promote weight loss by reducing fat intake and minimizing impulsive snacking.

MYTH: Eating sugar causes diabetes.

FACT: Diabetes is caused by a lack of insulin in the body. Since foods that are high in sugar are often high in calories, overeating those foods can lead to weight gain. Research shows people who are overweight and obese are at increased risk of diabetes.

MYTH: Occasionally following a fad diet is a safe way to quickly lose weight.

FACT: Many fad diets are developed by people with no science or health background so some fad diets can even be considered harmful to people with certain health problems. When trying to lose weight, consult a registered dietitian.

Source: 2008 American Dietetic Association

Don't Forget!
Daylight Savings Time Begins
Sunday, March 9th



*The thing that goes the farthest toward making life worthwhile
That costs the least and does the most
Is just a friendly smile.*

~ Alfred Criswell

Save Some Green by Going Green with Your Grocery Shopping

"We cannot do everything at once, but we can do something at once."

~Calvin Coolidge, former United States President

Perhaps you haven't yet started on recycling the many containers that package food purchases. And, maybe you have limited access to some of the "greener" food products on the market. Yet there are many things you can do if you're interested in a "greener," more environmentally friendly household. Read on for more easy steps you can take right now. They also will save you money, adding a little extra green to your wallet!



- Size matters.** When choosing between a large container and several small containers that add up to the same volume: Consider whether buying the large container would serve the same purpose and save you money? For example, do you really need to buy individual boxes (and more packaging) of juice if they all are drunk in the same week and at your kitchen table?
- It's in the bag.** While we could all carry our own reusable shopping bags when we go shopping, if we don't we can reuse any plastic grocery bags we might accumulate to line small wastebaskets. Put a few bags in the bottom of the wastebasket BEFORE you line it, so there's another one ready to use after one is filled.
- Gotta have a plan!** Plan ahead and shop less often for groceries or shop in conjunction with other errands taking you near a grocery store. The result is a reduction in the use and cost of fuel needed to transport food.
- Practice the 3 Rs.** Produce less waste AND save money by practicing the 3 Rs of reduce, reuse and recycle. Here are three examples in relation to throwing away leftover food. Not only does tossing leftovers waste money, it also wastes the energy resources and packaging materials associated with the tossed food.
 - **Reduce** the amount of leftover food tossed by serving smaller portions of foods that frequently produce leftovers OR...
 - **Reuse** leftovers by serving them again in a day or two or freezing them for future use, OR...
 - **Recycle** leftovers into a different type of meal; for example—add that extra rice to a soup the next night.
- Don't be a "spoil"-sport.** Throwing away spoiled food is related to tossing leftovers. Reduce the amount of spoiled food that gets tossed through such practices as:
 - Read labels for "use by," "expiration," or "best if used by" dates.
 - Refrigerate and freeze foods at recommended temperatures—0 degrees F or lower for freezers and 40 degrees F or lower for the refrigerator section. An appliance thermometer assures your refrigerator/freezer is maintaining these temperatures.
 - Follow recommended storage times for foods. For example, some containers may specify a recommended time frame in which to eat a food after it is opened.
 - Avoid buying so much food in bulk that it spoils before you can use it.
- Drink to this.** Buy a reusable water bottle and fill it with tap water. Your investment soon will pay for itself.
- Bulk it up.** Some products purchased at the grocery store, such as hand soap, can be purchased in big bottles that are used to refill a smaller bottle size. Reduce the cost and the packaging by refilling the smaller bottle.

Source: Alice Henneman, MS, RD, and Lorene Bartos, MS, Extension Educators, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension

Grab a Spoon For 4-H's New Ice Cream

Looking for a taste of 4-H? Blue Bell Creameries unveils "Centennial Cupcake" to celebrate more than 100 years of the 4-H Youth Development organization. Find your local Blue Bell retailer or buy online at www.fourhcouncil.edu/icecream.aspx.

BLUE BELL ICE CREAM
Centennial Cupcake
Artificially Flavored Cake Batter Ice Cream with Cake Pieces, Chocolate Filling and Four Leaf Clover Sprinkles
Celebrating Over 100 Years of 4-H

A portion of the proceeds from this product will be used to promote 4-H educational programs. No endorsement of this product by 4-H is implied or intended. Authorized by the USDA.



Easter Bunnies

The Easter Bunny and parents often give children young rabbits as presents around this time of year. An area animal science specialist with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System says rabbits can be good pets, but they have some basic requirements.

Robert Spencer says to maintain a healthy rabbit in a suitable environment, owners must meet some basic needs for the pets.

“Some necessities include a cage as the bunny develops into a rabbit, a feeder and water bottle that hang on the side of the cage, feed and hay, and possibly a few toys,” says Spencer. “This equipment and food items can be purchased at many pet stores or feed stores. A good place to look is the location where the bunnies were originally purchased.”

Rabbits make suitable indoor or outdoor pets. Pet owners will have to decide which is the best option for them.

If the rabbit will be an indoor pet, owners have several aspects to consider. First, rabbits can be litter trained. The process is as easy as house-training a cat.

Next, rabbits can be destructive if left unattended outside their cages.

“Owners should be prepared to keep a watch on the rabbit if it is loose in the house,” he says. “They may chew on furniture or electrical cords or shred carpet if unsupervised.”

Spencer says a rabbit’s digestive system will not tolerate much variety in their diet. “It is best to stick with processed rabbit feed and hay,” he says.

Also, they can become easily stressed by other house pets such as dogs or cats. Introduce other indoor pets to the rabbit for short periods of time until they become accustomed to each other.

If the rabbit will be an outdoor pet, there are some additional factors to consider. The need for a cage, water bottle, feeder, and hay still apply. However, the rabbit and cage will need shelter to keep them dry in bad weather. Shelter will also help the rabbit avoid heat stress and provide protection from predators.

Keeping the rabbit dry is especially important in cold weather. They can become chilled and develop hypothermia. “Hot weather can be a problem too. Rabbits do not deal well with

direct sunlight or extreme heat and humidity.”

Spencer adds they do not tolerate temperatures higher than 90 degrees. In extreme heat, they may experience heat stress and die.

Place the rabbit and its cage in an area that has a roof with moderate air flow. If using a fan, make sure it moves air above the cage, not into the cage. A frozen water bottle can serve as an air conditioner during the heat of summer.

Indoors or outdoors, rabbits enjoy playing with toys. A variety of appropriate toys can be found at pet stores and some feed stores. Make sure they are labeled for rabbits. Simple things found around the house also make great toys. Clean, empty cans with no labels or sharp edges are an option as are clean, empty plastic bottles or a section of PVC pipe. Rabbits will spend lots of time playing with their toys.

Cage size requirements for a rabbit depend on how large it will become as an adult. Rabbits are generally classified according to size and weight. Small rabbits weight about two to five pounds at maturity, medium breeds five to eight pounds, and large breeds eight to twelve pounds.

Spencer says a medium-sized rabbit needs a cage that is 24 inches wide, 24 inches deep and 18 inches high. For smaller rabbits, something smaller is suitable. Larger rabbits need a bigger cage to provide adequate space.

Spencer encourages owners to learn more about the new pet. Books and other information can be found at the local library, pet store or bookstore. An Internet search will provide extensive information on rabbits. One excellent Web site is the American Rabbit Breeders Association at www.arba.net. It offers information on raising rabbits, rabbit shows and a rabbit registry.

For more information on being a responsible rabbit owner, visit the Extension website at www.aces.edu and search on rabbits.



Hummingbirds in Alabama

Hummingbirds are fun to watch and easy to attract by using feeders or by planting flowers in your yard. Feeders are inexpensive and easy to maintain. Hummingbird watching can be an exciting and fun-filled activity for the whole family.

Hummingbird Biology

The rubythroat hummingbird is common to all parts of Alabama. The male can be recognized by his deep red throat patch and dark green back. The female looks like the male except she has no red on her throat and has a lighter green back.

Occasionally, the rufus hummingbird is seen in Alabama, but it is not as common as the rubythroat. The male rufus has a "rufus" or brown color on its back, sides, tail, and head. Like the rubythroat hummingbird, the male rufus hummingbird has a reddish-colored throat patch, but it is more orange than ruby.

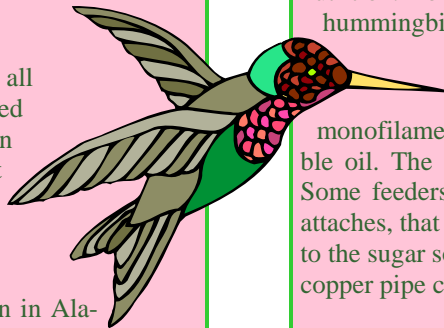
During their daily activity, hummingbirds burn a tremendous amount of calories and usually feed about four times an hour. They have tubular tongues that they extend deep inside flowers to reach nectar. Insects also make up a small portion of their diet.

Since a hummingbird cannot feed all night, it has to slow its body functions during the night. This state of suspended animation is called torpor. The hummingbird's body temperature and heart rate (normally about 200 beats per minute) drop and breathing slows to about 5 percent of what would be expected for a sleeping bird of hummingbird size. Hummingbirds can come out of torpor very quickly.

Feeding Hummingbirds

Hummingbirds are easily attracted to feeders in the spring, usually beginning in April or early May. Many types of feeders are commercially available, and most work well. A feeder that has a bee guard works best because it keeps bees from using the feeder. If too many bees are attracted to the feeder, hummingbirds will not use it.

Feeders are filled with nectar solution that is either purchased or made at home. For the homemade solution, mix 1 part table sugar to 4 to 5 parts warm water. The warm water makes the sugar dissolve faster. Allow the solution to cool before filling



the feeder. There is no evidence that hummingbirds need any nutrients other than pure, white table sugar. Be sure to keep feeders clean. Rinse the feeders with vinegar and hot water at least once a week, even if some solution is left. Avoid using detergents. Do not allow mold to grow on the feeder or let the feeding solution become cloudy. Discard old feeding solution and store extra fresh solution in the refrigerator.

Never use honey as a substitute for sugar in the solution. Hummingbirds **cannot** digest honey. They will eat a honey-based solution, but they will soon die from lack of nutrition. Honey may also transmit a fungus that is lethal to hummingbirds.

If ants are attracted to your feeder, coat the monofilament line (used to hang the feeder) with vegetable oil. The oil keeps ants from climbing down the line. Some feeders have a reservoir on the top, where the line attaches, that can be filled with oil to keep ants from getting to the sugar solution. A reservoir can be built using a 1-inch copper pipe cap and copper wire.

Many times, when one hummingbird begins to use a feeder, others are attracted as well. Males will set up territories around a feeder and defend it, not allowing other hummingbirds to use it. The aerial combat that follows is very entertaining. If the combat gets too intense, put up another feeder or two on the other side of your yard to limit confrontations.

Planting flowers around your home is also a good way to attract hummingbirds to the yard and garden. Red flowers are most effective. Planting of salvia, petunia, or trumpet vine, for example, will attract hummingbirds. Many other red flowers grow well in Alabama and will lure hummingbirds to your yard.

Hummingbird Migration

In the fall, leave your feeders up as long as the birds use them. Hummingbirds are migratory and travel south across the Gulf of Mexico and Central America when weather conditions are favorable in the winter. A rubythroat hummingbird can migrate 2,000 miles from breeding site to wintering grounds.

Don't worry about keeping hummingbirds here longer than they need to stay. They know when it is time to leave for their winter quarters. In the late summer or early fall, just before migration, a lot of hummingbirds may use the feeders and then disappear overnight.

Source: ANR-715 Hummingbirds in Alabama, H. Lee Stribling, Extension Wildlife Scientist, Professor, Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, Auburn University, October 2003

The Gardening Corner

*By: Tony Glover, Regional Extension Agent
Commercial Horticulture
Home Grounds, Gardens & Home Pests*



Herbs & Honeybees

A gardener writes: "I want to include herbs in my garden and need to know more about requirements for growing them. I'm also interested in attracting pollinators, especially honeybees. Which herbs will provide food or habitat for them?"

With spring fast approaching, honeybee populations in decline, and herbs gaining status with a variety of gardeners, this is a very pertinent question.

I asked Sallie Lee, Jefferson County Extension Agent, to respond as she works with Jefferson County Beekeepers and is involved with an heirloom herb garden project in Birmingham.

She replied: "Tony, to simplify the question, let's break the answer into two parts, one to address the herbs, one for the honeybees."

Herbs have many attributes that contribute to their increasing popularity in gardens and landscapes. Their historic use, from primarily culinary and medicinal, to the 21st century has expanded the role of herbs. Today, we grow herbs (or "erbs") for aesthetic reasons, for use in cooking (culinary), as medicinal, aromatics, ornamentals, household/industrial, and wildlife habitat.

Herbs are considered one of the easiest groups of plants to grow, and once established, most are considered low maintenance; they do very well with little water or fertilizer.

Requirements for growing herbs, regardless of reason, need to be considered before planting them in the ground. And, while herbs are adaptable to a range of soil and growing conditions, most don't do well in poorly drained soil. Another limiting factor is the amount of sun available to them; if the site receives less than 6-8 hours of sun a day, look for another site or consider herbs that can handle light shade. The sun/shade factor is especially important for pollinators, including honeybees, since most of them are

attracted to plants that flower in full sun conditions.

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

Herbs are a solution to the need expressed by many beekeepers; to increase nectar availability in an area. Herbs 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 gardeners should 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 of the garden as they will last for years without being replaced, although annuals can be used as fillers where appropriate.

Attracting wildlife, in this case a very special pollinator, takes a little extra work, but the effort is worth it when you see and hear the hum of honeybees visiting your herbs.

For additional information, pull up www.aces.edu publication ANR-1164 "Growing Herbs" or contact me at the St. Clair County Extension office.



Agent Spotlight



Cynthia Whittaker

Urban Regional Extension Agent

**Consumer Science & Personal Financial Management and
Community Resource Development**

Cynthia Whittaker joined the Alabama Cooperative Extension System ten years ago. She currently serves as Urban Regional Extension Agent in the areas of Consumer Science & Personal Financial Management and Community Resource Development. Before joining Extension, she worked in the hotel and hospitality industry. She is a native of Birmingham and a graduate of A.H. Parker High School. She earned her B.S. degree in Sociology from Auburn University. Cynthia lives in Birmingham.

Cynthia is housed in Jefferson County, but also serves St. Clair, Shelby and Blount counties. She has worked in St. Clair County conducting programs like *Put Your Best Foot Forward*, a non-traditional job preparedness lesson for youth and young adults, *Money Management: Leaks in Spending* and *Dress for Success*.

If you would like more information about consumer science and personal financial management or community resource development, please contact Cynthia at (205) 338-9416 or email at whittcl@auburn.edu. She will be happy to assist you.



Master Gardener Association Plant Sale

Mark your calendars now and plan to attend the St. Clair County Master Gardener Association Plant Sale. Proceeds benefit community service projects.

Date: May 2nd, 3rd & 4th
Time: 8:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m.
Location: Springville 4-Way Stop (behind rock house in open field)

For more information, please contact Mrs. Nola Shiflett at (205) 640-2475 or Mrs. Cathy Mezick at (205) 338-6931.

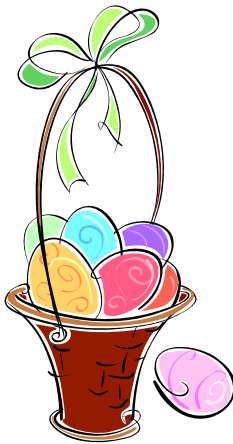



Surfing the Web?

Visit the St. Clair County Extension Office

www.aces.edu/StClair

Avoiding a Green Ring Around Hard-Cooked Egg Yolks



Perhaps you've hard-cooked an egg only to discover a green ring around the yolk when you crack it open. Here's what happened and what you can do to avoid it, according to Mary Torell, Public Information Officer, Nebraska Department of Agriculture, Poultry & Egg Division:

"A greenish-gray ring may appear around a hard-cooked egg yolk. It's unsightly, but harmless. The ring is caused by a chemical reaction involving sulfur (from the egg white) and iron (from the egg yolk), which naturally react to form ferrous sulfide at the surface of the yolk. The reaction is usually caused by overcooking, but can also be caused by a high amount of iron in the cooking water.

"Eliminate the ring by avoiding overcooking and by cooling the eggs quickly after cooking. Run cold water over the just-cooked eggs or place them in ice water (not standing in water) until they have completely cooled. Then refrigerate the eggs in their shells until you're ready to use them. Hard-cooked eggs in the shell can be refrigerated up to one week."

Source: *Cook It Quick, UNL Extension in Lancaster County*



Omelets in a Bag

Have guests write their name on a quart-size freezer bag with a permanent marker. Crack 2 eggs (large or extra-large) into the bag (not more than 2) and shake to combine them.

Put out a variety of ingredients such as: cheeses, ham, onion, green pepper, tomato, hash browns, salsa, etc... Each guest adds prepared ingredients of choice to their bag and shakes to combine. Be sure to release any air that is in the bag before zipping up the freezer bag.

Place the bags into rolling, boiling water for exactly 13 minutes. You can usually cook 6-8 omelets in a large pot. For more, make another pot of boiling water. Open the bags and the omelet will roll out easily. Be prepared for everyone to be amazed.

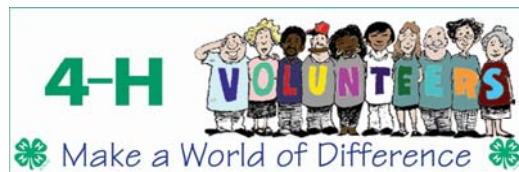
Nice to serve with fresh fruit and coffee cake; everyone gets involved in the process and a great conversation piece.

Recipe courtesy of Ms. Flo Mashburn, St. Clair County Farmer's Federation Women's Committee.

4-H Archery Club



The St. Clair County Extension Office is proud to announce our latest 4-H Volunteer-Led Club that has formed. The St. Clair County Stray Arrows 4-H Club, an archery club, recently held its kick-off meeting. The club is led by volunteer leaders—Robin Crenshaw and Pam Ayres.



Home Gardening Information Available

- **Soil Sample Boxes** available at the St. Clair County Extension Office. Cost: \$7/per sample.
- **Master Gardener /Horticulture Hotline** available M-F, 9 a.m.—3:30 p.m. Toll-free # (888) 574-2451.
- **Horticulture Hotline** available M-F, 9 a.m.—4 p.m. Toll-free # (800) 644-4458.
- **Home Garden Website:** www.aces.edu/homegarden
- **Contact an Expert.** Regional Extension Agents Charles Pinkston and Tony Glover are available to answer your home horticulture, home garden and home pest management questions. They can be reached by phone at (205) 338-9416 or by email: Charles—pinksch@auburn.edu or Tony—gloveta@auburn.edu
- **Free publications** available at the St. Clair County Extension office, located on the lower level of the St. Clair County Courthouse in Pell City, and on our website at www.aces.edu/StClair Just click the *Publications* link at the top of the page.

Three Ways to Eliminate Wire Eyesores



A recessed box with no visible wiring insures an aesthetic look for your flat panel television.

Wires. They're ugly; there's no two ways about it. Whether it's those unsightly black wires hanging down the wall behind your flat panel television or that dust collecting rat's nest growing behind the media center, ugly wires and cables detract from the beauty of your home.

And yet everything from the most modern wall-mounted plasma television to your everyday cordless house phone requires wires to supply things like power and a cable or telephone hookup. A more complicated setup like a home theater system will need many of them to connect all the different components together. Naturally, you can use plastic or Velcro ties to keep the wires neatly bundled. But that doesn't really solve the problem; neat or not, they're still hanging out for all to see.

The Leviton Institute recommends you consider some of the following options for eliminating the perplexing problem of wire clutter.

Think Inside the Box

One of the best solutions available is a recessed ABS plastic box that flush mounts in the wall and is perfect for use

behind wall-mounted flat panel televisions, entertainment centers, wall units, and computer stations. The inside walls of the box can be fitted with up to three brackets delivering a combination of 125 volt current or low voltage signals such as cable or satellite, audio/video, Internet, or telephone.

Since the box is flush mounted with the connections recessed inside, it makes for an especially aesthetic look for large wall-mounted plasma or LCD televisions. It also does double duty as a convenient distribution center

for apartments, houses, co-ops and condos.

While they are easily retrofitted and work well in already existing homes, recessed entertainment boxes are especially useful when combined with the structured cabling.

Now being installed into 60% of new construction, structured cabling distributes voice, data, audio and video signals throughout the home on direct high-speed lines built right into the walls. A recessed box arrangement makes it possible to deliver any combination of signals that the homeowner chooses through custom-tailored connections in a neat, easy-to-use setup.

Floor Show

Floor box receptacles provide another solution to the wire clutter problem. Flush mounted right into the floor, their low-profile look provides an attractive alternative to those ugly power cords hanging off your wall outlets at all angles. They are also available with Ethernet or F-type connectors for a broad range of

applications. Floor jacks come with screw-in caps to prevent dirt or dust from getting into the receptacles when not in use.

Look Ma, No Cords

It may sound like a paradox, but one of the worst offenders around the home as far as wire clutter is concerned is the so-called "cordless" phone. The handset itself might be cordless, but the base unit most assuredly isn't, being connected to both an old-fashioned telephone line and a DC power supply or "wall-wart," one of those square, bulky transformers that looks just plain ugly and hogs space when plugged into a wall outlet.

One clever solution to the problem is a standard-size wall jack that comes with the DC power supply mounted on the inside of the wall plate so you can't see it. The telephone signal connects through the wall jack right into the phone. Just select the appropriate DC voltage for the model phone you're using, pick one of the universal plug adapters provided, and you're in business. Both the hanging external telephone wire and wall-wart eyesore are eliminated. These out-of-sight type jacks also work with answering machines or combo units.

Source: Leviton Institute, Home Electricity, Volume 13



Recessed Entertainment Box neatly conceals home theater wires.

Retirement Seminar



Do you know if you are saving enough for your future? Would you like to learn more about your financial needs during retirement? If so, plan to attend Extension's Retirement Seminar. Topics to be covered include: 1) Why planning retirement is important at every age; 2) Current trends in retirement planning; 3) How to determine how much you should save for retirement; 4) Investment products to consider to fund your retirement; and 5) Strategies for late savers and more!

Date: Thursday, March 6th

Time: 6:00—8:00 p.m.

Location: Jefferson State Community College,
Pell City Campus

Cost: FREE

*You must pre-register to attend. For more information, please contact
Regional Extension Agent Ruth Brock at (205) 338-9416 or email brockru@auburn.edu*



**Alabama Cooperative Extension System
St. Clair County Office**

1815 Cogswell Avenue
Suite #103/B04
Pell City, Alabama 35125

Phone: 205-338-9416
Fax: 205-338-9417
www.aces.edu/StClair