

Home & Garden



March 2023
The Daily Home

How an unintentional recipe fail ultimately led to my home pepper garden

“They are supposed to be like boats!” my friend exclaimed when I showed her the jalapeños sliced in half lengthwise. I had thought I was being helpful by cutting off the tops.

“I will go back to the grocery store to get more,” I feebly replied. The glare in her eyes and the prickly vibe emanating from her rigid posture as she held a handful of now-ruined sliced peppers were a sufficient non-verbal answer.

Before that day, I had never heard of jalapeño poppers. I had no clue how they were supposed to look. I did not think that anyone would eat the stems, which was why I cut off the tops. We were preparing for a celebration for her daughter’s pinning ceremony as a nurse. The issue was that the three grocery stores within driving distance were low on jalapeños, and the ones we found, while the best among what was available, were not that great.

Therefore, we made do with what we had, although they were ruined by her standards. She directed me to shell out the seeds and white membrane from inside the sliced jalapeño shells, then took over for the rest of the process. I watched as she exaggerated her motions of scooping whipped cream cheese mixed with bacon bits into the shells of the jalapeños laid out in four rows across two sheet pans.

Thirty minutes after the heavily loaded sheet pans were popped into the oven, the smell of the jalapeño poppers enticed my senses, making my mouth water.

I was nervous to try one, because I stayed away from jalapeños for several years after that one time in a Mexican restaurant when I ate a raw sliced piece for the first time, not familiar with the spiciness of a jalapeño. My eyes instantly filled up with water as such fiery heat seemed to torch the inside of my nose as I tried to breathe. Drinking water did not help, as tears kept streaming down my cheeks. I was embarrassed and clueless about the potency of jalapeños, especially since I was with others who were staring at me as if I should have known better. Someone advised me to eat some bread to alleviate the burning sensation on my taste buds.

Another lesson I learned from the jalapeños is the importance of washing my hands thoroughly before removing my contact lenses. However, I do not mind the tingly sensation on my lips after eating jalapeños, as it energizes me and boosts my metabolism.

Back to the daughter’s pinning ceremony celebration, the cream cheese did ooze a bit from the open-ended boats of sliced jalapenos, and yet I privately thought that the effect looked more tantalizing than if they were perfect boats holding the cream cheese. She carefully transferred the steaming jalapeño poppers onto the white ceramic platter. The celebration had begun now that the food was laid out on the table. After seeing how others grabbed not one but five or six of the jalapeño poppers, I decided to be brave and picked up two.

I hesitated for a scant second before tasting one. I had to close my eyes in ecstasy as I experienced my first jalapeño popper. I did not experience any spiciness as I appreciated the flavors bursting with such heavenliness. That was the turning point in my relationship with the peppers.

Ever since I fell in love with jalapeños, I became more aware of how they can be used in various ways, such as relish, jams or spicy margaritas. The more I learn how to incorporate jalapenos in my meals, the more I welcome spicy dishes. The spicier, the better. My love affair with jalapeños helps me find others who appreciate the art of the pepper, deepening my bond with them.

When visiting with my cousins at the lake last year, they proudly showed me their thriving garden that included jalapeños alongside tomatoes, banana peppers and bell peppers. We spent the entire visit discussing jalapeños and how to grow them. Before leaving, they handed over a jar of pickled slices of the wonderful spiciness. Inspired by the visit, I stopped by a garden center and purchased three jalapeo plants, along with soil and planters.



Sarah Elizabeth Moreman

I spent the rest of the day preparing new homes for the plants, and over the next few weeks, I watched them grow taller. When I returned home from a long trip, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the branches of my plants were weighed down with 21 huge jalapeños. They were practically as round and thick as small sweet potatoes, and their length was almost as long as an unsharpened pencil. I eagerly plucked one and blended a small fraction of it with protein powder, shredded carrots and berries to make a protein drink with a spicy kick. After pouring it into a tall glass, I took a generous sip. And as Goldilocks might say, “This drink is just right.”

As the warm season progressed, more jalapeños appeared on the plants, and I could not keep up with consuming them all. To preserve them, I froze the rest of the bountiful harvest in plastic freezer bags. Whenever using a jalapeño, I would let it thaw on a paper towel for a few hours before slicing it into smaller pieces to use in the smoothies and protein drinks or on spaghetti.

When making jalapeño poppers now, I cook some bacon before shredding it and placing it on top of the cream cheese filling mixed with a bit of butter, chopped green onions and some jalapeño seeds to add some spiciness. I still cut off the tops to let the cream cheese ooze.

Is your mouth watering yet?

Dr. Sarah E. Moreman is a writer, editor and educator based in central Alabama.



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OnPoint Land Management: ‘No job is too big or too small’

By **VALLEAN JACKSON**
Special to The Daily Home

Jason and Kari Harris are a dynamic couple who have developed a dynamic lawn care business. OnPoint Land Management is a locally owned family operation that offers a different approach to lawn care.

Kari says she and Jason know the business of landscaping and lawn managing “inside out” and strive to provide quality results with each customer. They service both commercial and residential properties with lawn maintenance, irrigation installs and repairs, hardscapes (seawall installs), tree removal, stump grinding, landscaping, one-time cleanup and rock or rip rap installs.

The Harris’ believe in making things happen, so they say that no job is too big or too small for them to take on. They provide and maintain well-manicured landscapes, retaining walls and other property improvements that homeowners can be proud of.

In an interview about OnPoint Land Management and what to expect for the spring when it comes to lawns, the husband and wife duo had the following to say.

Q: What is unique about OnPoint Land Management?

Kari: Our experience and knowledge is what sets us apart from the competition. We didn’t just wake up one day and want to cut lawns. My husband is a horticulturist, and I have been a part of the business since day one. So between the day-to-day operation, marketing, customer service, maintenance, installs and so forth, we work together to provide all of the customers a great experience each time. I believe wholeheartedly that having a great business goes beyond just the service you are offering, and that is how we operate. We appreciate our customers for trusting us to do the service, as well as for their con-

tinued loyalty. We take the time to get to know our customers because making sure they feel valued as a customer for giving us their business is something we also want to acknowledge. So in a nutshell, we care beyond the service.

Q: Does the change of seasons affect how you work?

Kari: Not much, honestly. Every season brings about different needs, so business is always pretty steady. In the summertime, we pick up more maintenance jobs, during the winter more hardscapes are installed as people begin to prepare for the spring and summer months, and in the fall, it’s leaf clean-ups. However, tree removals, stump grinding and more can be needed over the course of any season as well as any of our other services, so we answer to the need of the season.

Q: With the spring approaching, what would you advise homeowners about when it comes to their yards?

Jason: As the springtime is approaching, I would recommend doing a spring cleaning or reset. Refresh beds by adding pine straw, mulch or river rocks. Both mulch and pine straw should be changed yearly, as it is good for your soil and helps to protect your plants. Prune your shrubs, remove any dead growth, pull weeds and begin to prepare for plant installation. If your beds aren’t properly maintained, the risk of plants not receiving nutrients could cause them not to grow as they once did.

Q: Do you have any suggestions for yardwork homeowners may do themselves?

Jason: When it comes to weeds, we recommend pulling weeds by their roots and not their leaves. If any part of the root is left, it can cause them to grow back. OnPoint Land Management does not offer weed control, but we do offer weed removal.



Jason and Kari Harris

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Fencing Unlimited: Improving properties throughout central Alabama

By VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Fencing Unlimited is a trusted name, installer, and supplier of fences and gates for residential and commercial properties that has served central Alabama for seven years.

No matter the reason a property owner may need a fence – whether it is for aesthetics, to protect the kids, to keep the dogs in, to keep the neighbors out, safety for a pool or just general peace of mind – Fencing Unlimited can care for it. Its aluminum fences, chain link fences, FenceTrac fences, ornamental steel fences, vinyl fences, and wood fences come with lifetime warranties, and options of custom gates, estate gates and automatic gates are available.

Owner Alex Harris understands how important it is to have privacy and security on and around your own property. Fencing Unlimited also has a Alabama home builder license that allows the business to build arbors, decks and pergolas and stain and seal both decks and fences. Harris had the following to say in an interview for this special Home & Garden issue.

Q: What does Fencing Unlimited add to the community?

Harris: I believe we make a difference in the community by providing jobs, doing a lot for the local municipalities, providing the community and surrounding areas with privacy and security, and we are working to get more into giving back. Nothing is set in stone yet, but I am working on a program titled “100 Men who Care” that will be composed of 100 men who will come together to raise money to donate to the community.

Q: Do changes in seasons affect your business?

Harris: Very slightly. I would say that rain affects production, but it does not stop us from having business. In winter, we don’t shut down because it’s cold. In fact, during the winter season is when we do our

larger projects, such as baseball and football fields, because it makes it easier to get the job done, as there are usually no games going on. Nevertheless, I would say from February to November are our busiest months. Over the course of a year, we install about 600 fences.

Q: What is the most popular product you offer?

Harris: Aluminum and ornamental steel fences are our biggest sellers. These two products along with all of our others come with lifetime warranties, and these particularly require little to no maintenance. Plus, they give the same look and curb appeal as a wrought iron fence that has been popular for years, minus the constant maintenance and possibility of rusting. Aluminum and ornamental fences are also more versatile than wrought iron fences.

Q: What is the most rewarding part of your job?

Harris: When people are happy. Everything that we do is an improvement of their property, so seeing their satisfaction when the job is complete is truly the best part of what we do. The work we have done for the Birmingham Zoo and TopGolf is a constant satisfaction. We are not only providing security for the property, but those who visit and seek entertainment or leisure. This is why our slogan is “Privacy and security is just the beginning.” A couple of projects we are working on this year include doing the fences at The Summit shopping center on Highway 280, and we are working on gaining industrial business.



Owner Alex Harris

Home & Garden

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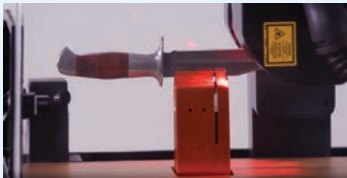


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The Pickle Patch offers unique treasures for the home

By **VALLEAN JACKSON**
Special to The Daily Home

“In the years that I have been in this business, I have learned that everybody collects something,” says Scott Williams, owner of The Pickle Patch Vendor Mall in Sylacauga.

The Pickle Patch offers a little bit of everything. The 13,000-square-foot mall includes about 70 vendors that offer everything from clothes to vintage glassware. The inventory changes constantly, and each visit to The Pickle Patch is like adventure where shoppers can discover their own personal treasures to adorn their homes.

Williams spoke with The Daily Home about the business he has operated since 2014.

Q: How great is the variety shoppers can find at The Pickle Patch?

Williams: We have about 66 booths, and they are sectioned off. The spaces are rented by different vendors. A lot of them are regulars, but we do have new vendors that come in when the space is available. Everything that is offered to the public is what they bring in to sell. Every week it is something different, because when they sell out, they have to change things up. So the diversity of antiques, collectibles, clothing, etc. are limitless.

Q: How does The Pickle Patch make a difference in the community?

Williams: It’s a unique store that provides an inexpensive way for people to earn extra income and provide unique and one-of-a-kind items to Sylacauga and surrounding areas. We have people that come from all over just to shop here. One thing that I love about being in this business is the opportunity to repurpose an old building. We have taken this old building and developed something in a sense like a flea market, but better. For the

people that are into finding treasures, collectibles and antiques, we have a constant customer base.

Q: What are the most popular items with customers?

Williams: That is something that is not easy to answer because, in a sense, the seasons tend to drive what customers are looking for. If it’s football season, then people are looking for sports-related stuff. In the winter, you have your mittens and coats, then you have figurines and things of that sort. In the early spring and summertime, we tend to sell a lot of furniture because people are moving or want to get some outdoor furniture. We are always selling furniture, but around those times, I notice people tend to venture towards furniture a lot more. So with such a large inventory of items, it’s hard to pinpoint one exact thing.

Q: As the owner, what do you enjoy most about The Pickle Patch?

Williams: I can answer that pretty easily. I love seeing the wide interests that people have. I have learned that just by looking at someone, you can not tell what they are into, and when you find out, it can shock you. So to see what people are into collecting and the stories that led to them starting that collection or finding that one piece they have been in search of is so rewarding. We have had people come from as far as Canada to shop here because this is the type of thing they are into. When traveling through or visiting the state, they make it their business to find places like ours. The chance to meet people from all walks of life and hear their stories is so rewarding and gives me joy to provide the business that I do.



Owner Scott Williams



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Sylacauga Portable Buildings offers structures for ‘anything you want them to be’

By **VALLEAN JACKSON**
Special to The Daily Home

“The chance to finally offer this business to the community is a long time dream come true,” said Justin Morris, owner of Sylacauga Portable Buildings.

The company is a Premier buildings dealer that sells portable structures, metal coverings and trailers. According to Morris, there’s nothing glamorous about selling them, but it is something quite amazing in the way the buildings impact the lives of others.

He says that in the year he has been in business, it has been “most rewarding to be able to deliver customers what they want, and make their dreams a reality, especially those customers that customize their buildings.”

Sylacauga Portable Buildings can be constructed as small as 6x10 and as large as 16x54. They can be metal or wood, lofted or non-lofted, with porches or without. The full array of building styles, sizes and colors can be seen on its website or in-person at 1075 Sylacauga Fayetteville Highway.

In an interview about portable buildings, Morris had the following to say.

Q: What is the purpose of a portable building?

Morris: Portable buildings can be for anything that you want them to be. It can be a seasonal thing where people use them to store the holiday decorations or

overflow of presents. I have seen people use them for enclosed shops and even use them to make tiny homes. The possibilities are endless. In the summer-time, we have an increase of people buying our metal covers that are great for boats, RVs, etc. Sylacauga Portable Buildings is the go-to place for country living, those that want to downsize, need extra storage or want to create their own work space at inexpensive costs.

Q: Can you customize the buildings, or do they just come standard?

Morris: There are some buildings that come standard that include windows, then you have those where people choose the option of having them installed. On our website, it shows every option we have with full descriptions and the sizes they are available. So the short term answer is yes, they can be customized. Windows can be added, electricity installed and interior walls even, if someone wants to make a room.

Q: Is buying a portable building expensive or inexpensive?

Morris: Inexpensive, I would say. They are way more affordable than buying a home or property. In fact, for the storage buildings we offer the option of rent-to-own, no credit check, and with a \$100 minimum down payment for size 8,10 and 12 buildings that are up to 40 feet long, it can be delivered. We offer free

professional delivery and setup within a 50-mile radius, and a 50-year siding warranty.

Q: Does a customer have to already own land prior to purchase?

Morris: No. All that we ask is for people to have a general leveled location for us to deliver the building. The buildings are designed to rest directly on their skids, and we use treated wood blocks for leveling. However, for those that want concrete blocks used instead, that is fine, but we require that they provide the blocks. As for permits, that is the responsibility of the buyer to follow up with. There are no certain licenses or permits needed to be shown to us in order to acquire a building.



Owner Justin Morris



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Hazelwood’s Nursery & Greenhouse: ‘We add color to the community’

By VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

John Hazelwood combined a hobby with his horticulturist skills to fulfill what he saw as a need in the community back in 1985. At that time, he says, there were few options available in the Pell City area for obtaining flowers and plants for home gardens.

Almost 40 years later, Hazelwood’s Nursery & Greenhouse has become a go-to provider of flowers, nursery plants, trees, bedding plants, shrubs, and almost any flowering plant you could think of. However, what makes Hazelwood’s unique is John’s horticulturist expertise that he incorporates daily into his inventory and shares with his customers.

Hazelwood understands how ambitious gardeners can be with spring approaching. However, from his years of experience he never wants to set anyone up to fail. He desires to make sure customers leave with what they want and are equipped with the knowledge to properly take care of their new plants. His commitment and hands-on approach to continue to beautify the community, help homeowners have amazing curb appeal and meet the plant needs of Pell City earned him the Outstanding Farm Family award in 2022 from the St. Clair County Farmers Federation.

A man of few words but much passion for his community plants, Hazelwood had the following to say in an interview with The Daily Home.

Q: How do you see your business’ role in the community?

Hazelwood: I would say we add color to the community. We have a variety of flowers and flowering plants that are available in correla-

tion with the seasons. So I believe that our wide selection offers not only another option to shop in the area but helps to continue to bring out the beauty in Pell City.

Q: How do you prepare for the spring season?

Hazelwood: We prepare for the spring by scheduling the plant materials we need. However, this year, I believe that it is going to be a strange one. I say that because I know people are going to be in trouble that have spring fever and are eager to get out in the yard. However, I would wait. There is a chance we might still encounter some frost. Frost could still be possible up until about April. We can’t stop someone from wanting to buy something, but our goal is to not sell it if it’s too early to plant.

Q: What advice do you have for beginning gardeners?

Hazelwood: I would tell them to have some idea of what they want to do, but also seek advice from an expert. Also in the beginner stages, take in that it’s mostly practice and learning as you go. Start slow, and as you gain experience over trial and error, then add more.

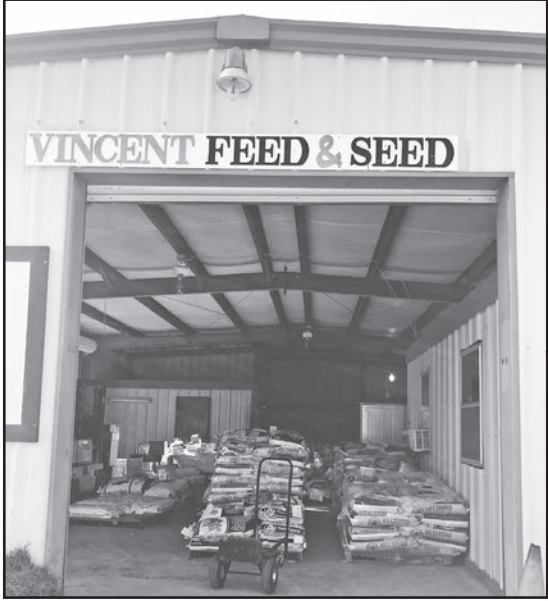
Q: What is a common mistake when it comes to proper gardening upkeep?

Hazelwood: A plant not having enough water. There are times when it’s too much water, but not having enough is usually more likely to be the case. It is based on the soil, and I recommend not watering them every day. Also, not watering them at all will kill them. Most plants need the right temperature and amounts of water to properly flourish. Nevertheless, I believe that most is learned from experience.



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General Manager Jon Cullimore attends the grand opening of Coosa Valley Electric Cooperative subsidiary Coosa Valley Technologies.

NEW SUBSIDIARY OF COOSA VALLEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE BRINGS BROADBAND TO THOUSANDS OF LOCAL HOMES

By VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Coosa Valley Electric Cooperative (CVEC) is a member-owned electric utility provider that has been served local residents for more than 80 years. The not-for-profit cooperative includes 14,500 members in Talladega, St. Clair, Calhoun, Clay, Etowah and Shelby counties. Its top goal is to make sure its member-owners receive affordable and reliable service.

General manager Jon Cullimore believes it is important to listen to them and the needs of the community. The CVEC subsidiary Coosa Valley Propane has already been serving about 4,000 local consumers, but there remained another need that the cooperative has sought to address.

With some areas unable to receive internet service, the decision was made to launch a broadband internet subsidiary known as Coosa Valley Technologies. Initiated in early 2021, this service provides a home internet service to those who were initially unable to benefit from any form of broadband services.

Cullimore says that in his 22 years of working with the cooperative, it is “truly rewarding” to be able to offer a service that many customers were not able to have access to. In an interview about Coosa Valley Technologies, he had the following to say.

Q: Why was Coosa Valley Technologies developed?

Cullimore: To offer internet services is something that our members wanted, and we heard them, and the board supported this decision. It was a need that long ago needed to be addressed. As we work to deliver the best service and highest quality, we are building a brand-new all-fiber service that does not have any copper. We are almost done building out the service, and in retrospect we are adding about 100 customers a week. To offer internet services was something that was already in the works and that we had started.

However, Covid became the biggest hurdle, but now we are fully on track to finish what we started.

Q: How popular has the new service proved to be?

Cullimore: Broadband is one of those things that sell itself. If customers need the service, they are going to reach out and inquire. For instance, in the areas that have no service, to know that they now can is something we don’t have to sell them on. They are more than eager to sign up. Our service is not by room. We have flat rates and no hidden fees. If you want more coverage, it’s \$10, but that is something that is known upfront. Unlike competing companies, we won’t go up after a certain amount of months. What you pay initially is what you will continue to pay. For 300 mbps, it’s \$59.99, and for an additional \$10, wifi can be added. For more speed, we offer 500 mbps at \$99, and we also offer phone services.

Q: What has been the biggest challenge since launching the new subsidiary of CVEC?

Cullimore: In offering a broadband service that is faster and cheaper than anyone in our area, our biggest struggle is meeting the installation demands of customers. However, we work hard and effectively to get to everyone serviced in a timely manner and get everything properly installed. Since launching, we are already serving about 3,000 customers.

Q: How does CVEC makes a difference in the community?

Cullimore: I believe we have a business where we are committed to community service, innovation, accountability and fairness. We are constantly striving to improve and provide the best customer service and products. We also have been a part of adding about 6,000 jobs to the area, and we are heavily involved in economic development.

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Carter’s Hardware has been a cornerstone in Munford for more than a century



By **VALLEAN JACKSON**
Special to The Daily Home

Carter’s Hardware & Auto Parts is a locally owned family business that has been in Munford for more than 100 years.

As one of the oldest businesses in Munford, customers appreciate the customer service, knowledgeable staff, convenience, reasonable prices and the large inventory of almost anything needed for home repairs and DIY projects. Aside from hardware, tools and appliances, Carter’s also offers reasonably priced propane, according to owner Gary Carter.

“There is not much to talk about when it comes to a hardware store,” Carter said, “but the history of families and how the community has grown with us is to talk about.” He has enjoyed watching generations come

through the store.

In an interview with The Daily Home, Carter had the following to say about his historic business.

Q: How does Carter’s Hardware & Auto parts make a difference in Munford?

Carter: We are here for a lot of people whether they have lived here their entire lives or they are passing through. As the only hardware place in Munford, our presence is big as the location is convenient and saves people the trip of having to travel to Anniston or Talladega for their hardware needs. So I strongly believe that if I wasn’t here, they would definitely miss me.

Q: For the spring season, what are the most popular items customer buy?

Carter: With it warming up outside, a lot more peo-

ple tend to venture out in the yard. So a lot of people start coming in to buy weed eater cords, hose pipes, lawn mower blades, trimmer lines, and propane – things of that nature. It makes sense, with wanting to maintain the grass and the chance to be outside again.

Q: What advice do you have for shoppers in your store?

Carter: Simply put, just come in and shop. We have the knowledge to match the service and products. You will not just come in here wandering around. Whatever you need, we make sure you leave with what you need and are satisfied. In all my years, I’ve rarely had someone to come in and not find what they needed.

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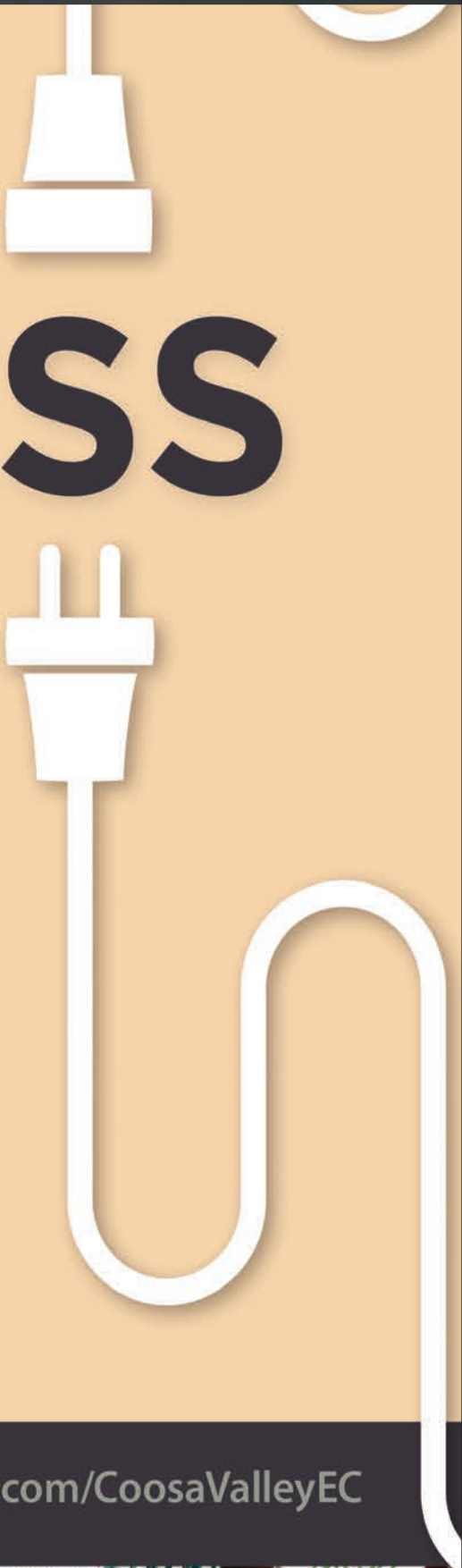
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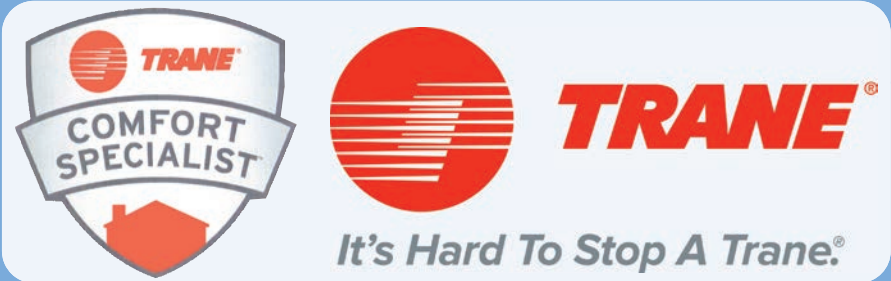
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Building home furnishings is a family tradition for Morris Custom Marble & Granite



By VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Phillip Morris is the owner of Morris Custom Marble & Granite. He is happily following in the footsteps of his father in the business that his father built from the ground up.

Morris Custom Marble & Granite is a family-owned business that has operated since 1982. It is one of the first granite countertop businesses in Alabama. For more than 40 years, Morris has been the go-to place in Sylacauga and neighboring communities for natural stone needs. It specializes in custom cabinets and countertops with a wide variety of stones from granite to marble.

Morris began working with his father at age 17 while he was still in high school. He could have pursued another career, but he found his niche working in the family business. In an interview with The Daily Home about Morris Custom Marble & Granite, he had the following to say.

Q: During which time of the year do you get the most business?

Morris: We are busy all the time, quite frankly. Maybe it slows down a little when kids are going back to school, but I always have something going on. So I couldn't pinpoint what month or season is busiest because the schedule stays packed. I guess that means we are doing something right.

Q: Is there a misconception about the products you build you'd like to address?

Morris: That there is no upkeep needed for granite countertops, and that when you get tired of looking at the cabinets that you have, it's time to replace them. Also, the cost isn't as bad as many people think. People tend to think that getting granite or marble countertops or custom cabinets is expensive, but I tell them that they will be surprised at how affordable the products and services are compared to what they think.

Q: What is the most rewarding part of your work?

Morris: The finished product. This is not the business for someone lazy. Seeing the job done right the first time after making sure everything is installed properly and that it reflects what the customer wants is one of the best feelings.



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'Bring your ideas to us, and we can make them happen'

Webb Concrete & Flooring keeps timeless, classic style affordable

By **FAITH DORN**
Special to The Daily Home

Webb Concrete and Flooring, located in Pell City, specializes in hardwood, tile, carpet, laminate, vinyl, countertops, vanity, tubs and wallpaper.

Brittney Owen, flooring manager, is dedicated to making sure customers get the materials and styles that will best complement their spaces, regardless of project budget.

"Really great style should not be exclusive to the rich. Sometimes you need a little help to make that happen," explained Owen. "Such as using porcelain instead of marble. It still looks great, but porcelain does not cost as much."

Owen said that tile and hardwood planks are getting larger. The new larger sizes cost about the same as traditional sizes, but the larger size makes installation faster.

Webb Concrete and Flooring saw an uptick in carpet sales during the pandemic. "I think people forgot how easy carpet is," Owen said with a laugh.

For customers who prefer hardwood or tile flooring, she said that the popular flooring style now is going away from distressed, farmhouse and rustic looks and instead going for more of a traditional look: pale oak or medium brown hardwood with a wider plank. Traditional hardwood planks are three and a quarter inches or five inches, and the newer planks are now closer to seven inches or nine inches.

"I would say we are going with a more classic and timeless look that won't date your home as much," Owen said. "People want a more traditional look in bigger sizes."

A popular trend in flooring is black and white diamond entryways. This is a timeless look and a French or Charleston theme. Webb Concrete and Flooring liked the trend so much that they used that kind of flooring for the entryway to their showroom.

"It is a timeless feature that is not just for the 'highest class' of people. We love to take these 'over the top' ideas and make it so everybody can afford it," said Owen. "That is our niche. You bring your ideas to us, and we can make them happen for you."

According to Owen, vinyl plank is waterproof, can look like wood or tile and costs starting around \$5-\$5.50 per square foot installed. Hardwood can start around \$6-\$6.50 per square foot installed, but Webb also has some material that costs \$12 per square foot installed.

Although the choices of materials, colors and patterns can feel overwhelming, Owen and the rest of Webb Concrete and Flooring are ready to help customers make the best decision for their space. Owen believes customers need someone knowledgeable about flooring to avoid spending more than necessary on a project.

The he number one issue for most flooring customers, she says, is that a customer has had a particular flooring for 20 years and decides they want to do vinyl plank without factoring in the height of their baseboards or door jams.

"If your baseboards and door jams are set at a certain height, you have to build up the floor. That means spending a lot of money on plywood and vinyl plank when you could have gotten hardwood flooring for a better cost in this instance," Owen said.

Owen says the difference in the customer service provided by Webb Concrete and Flooring can even be seen through details in the showroom.

"We try to set ourselves apart. When you enter our showroom, you are not just having to look through racks and racks. We display everything differently than other showrooms. We want to help you make the best decision for your home," she said.

For more information, call Webb Concrete and Flooring at 205-338-0999, or visit webbconcrete.com.



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Knowledge, experience and skill are hallmarks of hometown pest management service

By **VALLEAN JACKSON**
Special to The Daily Home

“Payne Science Pest Management was created to give our hometown of Talladega and surrounding counties quality pest control services at affordable rates,” says owner, operator and lead technician Kyle Payne.

The business he now owns and is passionate about was originally founded by his father, Kenny Payne, in 1996. For 27 years, they have offered a wide array of services, from general maintenance to specialized treatments in both commercial and residential properties.

When asked what he finds most rewarding in his line of work, Payne expressed that knowing customers are happy with a pest-free home is “a priceless feeling. A business built on commitment and trust are two of the main ingredients in the formula of what our business was founded upon.”

Payne explains that the “science” of the business is in reference to technicians’ knowledge, experience and skill incorporated in what they do. In an interview about his business and pest control in the spring season, he had the following to say.

Q: Is spring your busiest season?
Payne: Absolutely! As the weather is warming up, it is like our calls triple during spring and continue through

the summer and fall seasons. When the ground reaches a certain temperature – I would say about an average of 60 degrees usually – pests start coming out of hibernation, so to speak. As the temperatures increase and stay steady, we know to prepare for busy days ahead as the calls and inquiries start.

Q: What should homeowners be aware of this season?
Payne: It’s the season for termite swarms, so I would have to say to beware of termites because this is the time of the year for this certain pest.

Q: What pests are gardeners likely to see as they start to garden this year?
Payne: I would tell gardeners to beware of mahogany wasps. They are pollinators, and they are attracted to blooms. I would recommend getting a routine exterior treatment done that will knock the population down.

Q: What is something that you are hoping to accomplish within your business this year?
Payne: As a business, I hope to keep growing. I want our work and service to continue to speak for itself, as well as continue to provide a family-owned business that’s reliable. I also aspire to meet new people to create personal relationships as well as business relationships.



Owner Kyle Payne

Pollen: A sticky situation for the better

By **COLE SIKES**
Special to The Daily Home

The appearance of pollen typically marks the beginning of spring, and it literally shows. If your vehicle or home recently received a natural paint job, there is a positive meaning behind the new look. According to Alabama Cooperative Extension System experts, people should view pollen in a different shade other than yellow.

What is pollen?
Simply defined, pollen is a powder-like substance that is produced by flowering plants and trees. Every tiny grain of this substance contains reproductive material known as male gametes that are used in fertilization of flowers—ultimately producing a seed. According to Alabama Extension Home Grounds Regional Agent Mallory Kelley, humans have a direct relationship with pollen.
“Without pollen we would not exist,” Kelley said. “We can thank it for all of our fruits and vegetables that we eat every day.”
Kelley explains that pollen is released differently by each plant and at different temperatures and times of the year. For example, when cool crops such as cabbage, kale and broccoli receive consistently warmer temperatures, their natural defense is to begin reproducing. The plant(s) will begin to grow longer shoots to produce flowers and begin pollinating.
As a secondary reaction, bees will also begin pollinating these plants as well. Pollen is primarily transported by insects and wind—causing everyone to see it latch onto virtually everything in sight.

Where does it all come from?
In 2023, the common association of pollen’s coming out party with a particular month of the year has not proven to be accurate. Alabama’s consistent warmer temperatures during February has caused plants to begin pollinating earlier than usual.
“Temperature certainly has an effect on pollen dispersal,” said Drew Metzler, an Alabama Extension forestry and natural resources regional agent. “In most years, I typically don’t see pine pollen dispersal in central Alabama until mid-March. Because we have had a string of consistently warm weeks in February and early March, it has accelerated the dispersal process by several weeks.”
According to Metzler, all trees in Alabama pollinate including hardwoods and pines. In order to produce a viable offspring, cross pollination is necessary for trees to produce seeds. Trees are pollinated primarily by

insects, birds and wind. Some examples of wind-pollinated trees are Southern yellow pines (i.e., loblolly, longleaf, shortleaf and slash) as well as oaks.
“Because they are dependent upon wind pollination, these trees tend to saturate the air with pollen because it is dry and light, allowing it to travel through the air for miles,” Metzler said. “Pine pollen is the most notorious because it tends to be much larger than hardwood pollen. This is the reason why people can literally see clouds of it this time of year—both in the air and when it settles on vehicles and homes.”

Remedying a Sticky Situation
For those who are not fans of pollen—especially those with seasonal allergies—any remedy for removing or avoiding pollen is welcomed. Spring normally brings frequent rains that knock it out of the air as well as off of vehicles, roofs and outdoor furniture.
“We are used to getting more consistent rainfall,” Kelley said. “We have been more dry than normal, so we need more rain to arrive.”
Other practices to prevent pollen from interfering with everyday activities are listed below.
► Bring in outdoor furniture cushions to reduce exposure.
► Keep windows closed so that pollinated air doesn’t infiltrate your home.
► Exercise inside rather than outside.
► Take showers more frequently—especially prior to going to sleep to reduce potential contamination in bedding.
► Bathe pets more often because their fur typically carries pollen granules much like human hair.

A Different Point of View
Although pollen can be overwhelming at times, it serves as a perennial reminder of life’s cycles. The old saying don’t curse the rain applies in the same fashion to pollen. Too much rain (in this case pollen) can have negative effects; however, its purpose is pure, and many forms of life rely on it. Each season when everything seemingly has a yellow tinge, remind yourself that nature is at work—ensuring that our everyday needs are met.

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TAKING CARE OF TOMATOES

Watering and Mulch and Scout for Disease and Insects

By **KATIE NICHOLS**
Special to The Daily Home

Tomatoes are by far the most popular plant in the vegetable garden, but can also be the most problematic. Eliminate the questions and begin the official summer season with proper tomato care.

Weather, garden insects and environmental disorders—as well as viral, fungal and bacterial problems—are all challenges every gardener faces when growing backyard tomatoes. An awareness of potential problems before they arise is one way to make sure the backyard tomatoes thrive.

Alabama Cooperative Extension System Regional Home Grounds Agent Mallory Kelley said there are many things to watch for when growing tomatoes to ensure a healthy crop. As the hot and humid summer starts up, Kelley provides the following tips to keep plants healthy.

Watering and Mulch

When it comes to water, Kelley recommends starting with drip irrigation or hand watering only at the surface of the soil to avoid splashing. Then prune all lower limbs off the tomatoes that are touching the soil and apply mulch.

“Mulching your tomatoes keeps the plants moisture level consistent and will help prevent blossom end rot,” she said. “Applying mulch also helps control weeds where insects like to overwinter and eliminates competition for the fertilizer you have applied.”

Mulch also creates a barrier between the plant leaves and the soil to suppress many of the fungal problems that come from the surface of the soil.

Scout for Disease and Insects

For diseases and insects, time is of the essence. Remove yellow and brown spotted leaves as soon as they appear, and if a fungicide plan is not in place, start a fungicide application to prevent early blight.

“No tomato grower can avoid this problem,” Kelley said. “It’s best to apply a preventative fungicide when

the plants are healthy and there is no disease present. Products with the active ingredients chlorothalonil and mancozeb will control early blight.”

Kelley said copper is an option to control bacterial issues. It is best to scout daily for all of these problems, as well as insects.

“Go out and inspect for armyworms, fruit worms, hornworms and stinkbugs,” she said. “These are the main insect problems on tomatoes.”

Products that contain *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) will work when the worms are young. Gardeners can also use products containing carbaryl if the worms are larger. Another insecticide that will control stinkbugs, and some of the other pests gardeners may find, is bifenthrin.

“Don’t wait until your plant has no more leaves before you start your search for the hornworm,” Kelley said. “Scout today because the plant may not be there tomorrow.”

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Picking, prepping and packing vegetables for the freezer

By **JUSTIN MILLER**
Special to The Daily Home

The harvest may be plentiful, but the storage is likely few. If every flat kitchen surface is filled with garden goodies, freezing the surplus is a great way to enjoy fresh vegetables all year long.

The Three Ps of Freezing

Gardeners can take some simple steps to ensure quality freshness for 8 to 12 months.

“When properly picked, prepped and packed, vegetables can hold their fresh qualities for about a year,” said Janice Hall, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System coordinator for Macon County.

Picking

When picking vegetables to freeze, time is of the essence. In fact, a good rule of thumb is to have the produce picked, prepped and packed in the freezer within two hours of picking them.

In general, vegetables are better if they are picked early in the morning, right when the dew is off the vines. When picking vegetables

to freeze, remember tender and just-matured ones are best.

Prepping

The first step to prepping vegetables is a thorough wash. This is the perfect time to look for inferior or overly mature vegetables; remove those. After washing, it is time to blanch. Blanching is a cooking method in which the vegetables are quickly cooked with water to stop the enzyme action. If not blanched, this enzyme action can cause loss of flavor, color and texture.

“Properly blanching vegetables is a must,” Hall said. “This stops the enzymes from destroying the fresh flavor of the vegetables, while also removing bacteria.”

After the vegetables have been properly blanched, they must be “shocked” in cold ice water to stop the cooking process.

“To stop the cooking, submerge the vegetables into cold water that is at least 60 °F or below,” Hall said. “Blanching and cooling should take about the same length of time.”

Packing

Choosing the right container is

essential when packing vegetables for the freezer. Instead of large bunches, Hall suggests packing meal-size portions firmly in moisture- and vapor-resistant freezer containers. Use containers that are odor-free, grease-resistant and crack-proof at low freezer temperatures.

“It is important to check approved recipes for the required headspace,” Hall said. “Headspace is the distance from the opening of the container to the packed food. It allows for expansion of the food as it freezes.”

Label and date containers before storing in the freezer. Freezer tape is another way to identify vegetables and packing dates. Do not overload the freezer, as this will add to the freezing times. For optimal quality, place the containers in the coldest part of the freezer and store at 0 °F or below.

In-depth freezing instructions are available in the Alabama Extension publication Freezing Summer’s Bounty of Vegetables available at www.aces.edu.

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The Home Gardener's Guide to Corn

By **AISLING FIELDS**
Special to The Daily Home

As many home gardeners know, there are many varieties of corn to choose from. Essentially there is sweet corn and field corn—with a lot of different varieties falling within these two categories.

As a home gardener, there are plenty of things to know before planting corn. There are some varieties that are better for creaming and storing and some better for making feed. Sweet corn is classified by its sweetness, while field corn is mainly used for animal feed, flour and meal. Deciding on what type of corn to plant all depends on the end goal.

Varieties for Creaming or Storing

The best varieties to grow for eating or making creamed corn depends on an individual's particular taste preferences.

“Some of the popular varieties include Silver Queen, Silver King and Peaches and Cream,” said Brian Brown, an Alabama Cooperative Extension System home grounds, gardens and home pests regional agent. “A person’s preference is going to depend on the corn’s level of sweetness and sugar retention, which is classified by su – sugary, se – sug-

ary enhanced, sh2 – supersweet and triple sweet.”

All of these varieties would make the perfect addition to any garden for those that are planning on creaming, storing or eating right off the cob. Sweet corn is picked when it is the most tender and ready to eat. This can be seen and determined by the brown silks at the top of the ear.

Varieties for Animal Feed, Cornmeal or Corn Flour

Field corn can be grown for both human and animal consumption. Unlike sweet corn, field corn is harvested when its kernels are dry and hard, making it the best option for things like flour and animal feed.

“Field corn can be used for animal feed, meal, flour and popcorn,” Brown said. “There are a few varieties that are for eating, such as Tennessee Red Cob, which is an heirloom variety that is really malty and starchy.”

When corn is dry and hard, it is easier to grind into powder for flour and meal. If this was tried with sweet corn it would just turn to mush. Animals, such as cattle and chickens, love the taste of corn in their diet.

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Spring Into Spring Free of Fire Ants

By **KATIE NICHOLS**
Special to The Daily Home

Gardeners preparing summer vegetable gardens may find their plots already teeming with life, but not the kind they would like to see. Fire ants are common in yards, flowerbeds, playgrounds and gardens throughout Alabama.

Kelly Palmer, an Alabama Cooperative Extension System livestock and forages regional agent, said there are many common misconceptions when it comes to controlling fire ant populations in the backyard or garden.

“This time of year, as homeowners get out in their flowerbeds or yards to begin preparations for planting, they may find several fire ant colonies have moved in over the winter,” Palmer said. “It is important to remember that most home remedies do not control fire ant populations.”

Palmer said the best control method for fire ants is to use baits. While the Internet is riddled with natural remedies, the tried-and-true application of fire ant bait—by the label recommendations—is most effective.

Home Remedy Misconceptions

Palmer said she sees many social media posts seeking recommendations for backyard fire ant control during the spring. Even though friends share home remedy recommendations with good intentions, these methods do not provide effective control.

Professionals do not recommend control methods such as grits, club soda, molasses, boiling water, mixing mounds together, gasoline or diesel fuel. These are not effective means of control.

“Part of the allure to home remedies is that all of the suggestions are cheap, easy to access and include products we are comfortable using,” she said. “However, they will leave the user ultimately feeling frustrated as they will not provide actual colony control.”

Baits

The key to fire ant management is to control the queen. Fire ant queens can lay hundreds of eggs per day and can live for years. Worker ants pick up bait products and take them back to the mound, where they feed the bait to the queen. Using baits ensures true colony control.

“Bait products are extremely safe for homeowners to use,” Palmer said. “They contain very little active ingredient (insecticide), are put out at low rates and leave no residuals. This makes them a great choice in areas where children and pets play.”

Choosing a Bait Product

There are many bait products on the market. All have label uses for different situations—whether those are lawns, gardens or pastures. This can make it overwhelming when trying to decide on which product to buy.

Palmer said there is no one-size-fits-all choice when it comes to choosing a bait product. Bait selection varies greatly depending on the person’s needs. Palmer said homeowners should answer the following questions:

- ▶ How fast do you need control?
- ▶ Where do you need control?
- ▶ How much are you willing to spend?

Once these questions are answered, contact your county Extension office. Agents there will be able to recommend products to meet your specific needs.




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