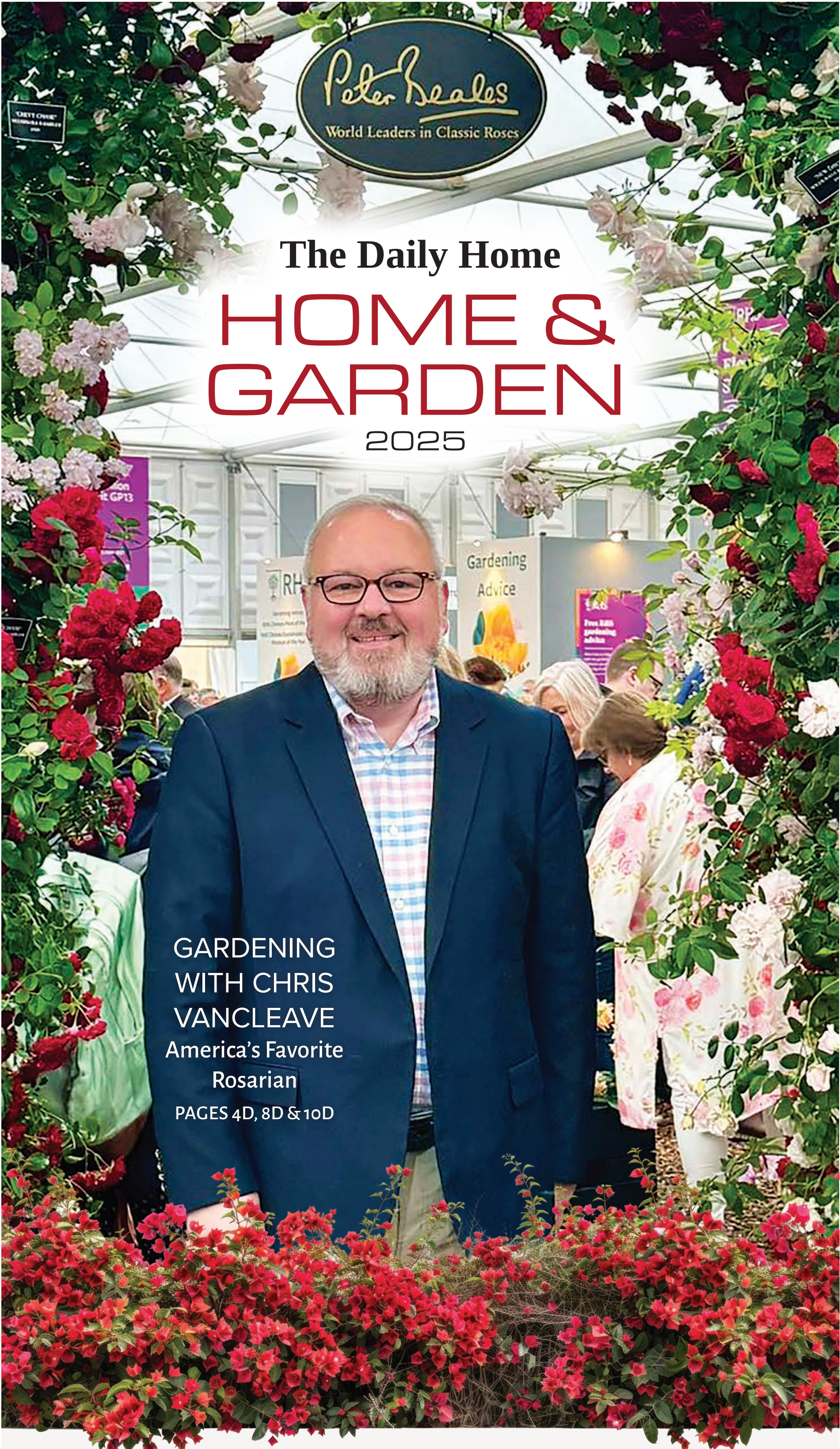




The Daily Home

HOME & GARDEN

2025

GARDENING
WITH CHRIS
VANCLEAVE
America's Favorite
Rosarian
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WHY DO WE GROW GARDENS?

THE ANSWER IS ALL ABOUT FAITH & HOPE

BY SUSAN COOK

My daffodils bloomed the day before the storms were set to rage through the state of Alabama on Saturday, March 15. Their happy yellow faces tilted toward me, nodding in silent greeting as they swayed on slender green stems, keeping time with the gentle breeze. It was as if they knew their time was fleeting and wanted to make the most of this bright, golden moment before the skies darkened. Or maybe that was just me, feeling a sense of foreboding, and reading way too much into the moment.

Still, I couldn't shake the thought. Flowers, after all, are delicate things, and storms are not, especially spring storms in Alabama. The forecast called for fierce winds, the kind that could rip shingles off rooftops, send tree limbs crashing to the ground, or much worse. I pictured my flowers caught in the chaos—torn from the soil, their fragile petals tossed into the air like bits of yellow confetti. They had only just arrived, and already, they were at the mercy of forces far greater than themselves.

And so are we, was the thought

that followed, even though it was one I preferred not to dwell on for too long.

I thought back to when I planted the flowers the year before—how hopeful and determined I had felt at the start. What began as a cheerful morning of gardening quickly became a test of endurance. My back ached, my hands cramped, and sweat traced hot paths down my spine. I had only planted two, yet four more waited, their bulbs waiting patiently like small, stubborn promises. I wiped my forehead and sank the trowel into the earth once more, wondering: *Why am I doing this again?*

Planting anything—whether an



entire garden or just a few tulips—is an act of faith. It's a commitment to the unseen, to something that takes root in darkness before it ever reaches for the light. It's hard work, sometimes thankless, and often full of uncertainty. You can dig, water, and tend as carefully as possible, but there are no guarantees. A cold snap might come too late in the season. A dry spell might stretch on too long. Pests, disease, and plain bad luck could undo all your efforts in an instant.

So why do we do it?

I used to feel a twinge of guilt when I picked flowers, knowing I was cutting short their already limited lifespan. Yet, I

couldn't resist the way they brightened the room, how they transformed an ordinary space into something alive and lovely. Their color-drenched petals, soft as velvet beneath my fingertips, released a fragrance so delicate it felt like a whisper on my nose. And when they began to wilt, their beauty slipping away petal by petal, I mourned them—but only for a moment. Because that is life, after all. A cycle of blooming and fading, of growing and letting go.

As I turned back to watching my daffodils, their golden faces turned toward a sun soon to be hidden behind storm clouds, I couldn't help but worry. Would they be uprooted, their stems snapped, their petals scattered alongside roof shingles in the coming storm? Maybe. Probably. But for now, they stood, bright and bold, unbothered by what the future might bring.

And perhaps that was the lesson they had to offer—the reason we plant flowers at all. Not for permanence, not for control, but for the fleeting joy they bring. For the reminder that beauty exists even in the face of uncertainty. For the hope that, no matter what happens, we can always plant again. And when the time is right, the blooms will return.



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PUBLISHERS

Blucher Ehringhaus • John Fry

EDITOR

Chris Norwood

SPECIAL PROJECTS EDITOR

Buddy Roberts

LEAD PHOTOGRAPHER

Tucker Webb

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Darla Allen

MARKETING/ADVERTISING DIRECTOR

Pam Isbell

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CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING MANAGER

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EVERY ROSE GROWER

HAS A STORY

WHAT'S YOURS?



BY CHRIS VANCLEAVE

Folks ask me all the time why I grow roses. When I think about it, It was just the natural progression of things. I come from a family that finds its roots firmly planted in the deep South and all its awesome traditions. During civil war times, women gathered at cemeteries to decorate the graves of “our glorious dead” with blankets of spring roses. They wept and celebrated the lives of those who so bravely “fought the good fight”. Even today families

gather for Decoration Day to decorate the graves of loved ones, to share a meal and to celebrate and remember.

Enter my first memory of a rose. Every year at Mother’s Day, our family would travel to Lawrence County, Tennessee, for Decoration Day at Center Point Cemetery. All the women in my family would wear a rose corsage to honor their moms. I seem to even remember a strict code of etiquette that was adhered to. It all had something to do with the color of the rose in relation to whether or not your mom was living or dead. These women wore their roses as a badge of honor and also to signify that they had somehow survived all that life had thrown at them. My grandmother, bent and haggard from a very difficult life, never looked prettier than on Mother’s Day as she wore a beautiful rose corsage. When she died, my mother went to great pains with the florist to prepare the perfect corsage of beautiful pink roses that she insisted upon placing herself.

From that beginning, I have always held roses in high regard. When I was older and I watched my mother hack her rose bushes to the ground, I had no idea that this annual “pruning” was one of the keys to growing a beautiful rose. I grew up and



married and all along the way roses were integrated into my life. At our first house, at the insistence of a neighbor, I uncovered the root ball of a rose and found it to be a Don Juan climber.

We moved to Alabama and purchased a home. In the back yard was one scraggly rose bush. My mother, by this time paralyzed and in a nursing home, was quick with advice on how to save it. “A judicious pruning, some coffee grounds and some of that miracle stuff (Miracle Grow).” I followed her advice, and the results were phenomenal. That spring, my mother passed away and I was the one giving specific instruction to the florist and had the honor of placing my mom’s final rose proudly on her chest.

So I dig in the dirt and tend my roses. I exhibit them in shows, and share them with friends, family, and strangers. I even began a podcast dedicated to roses. I do it to honor those who have gone before

me, and to help promote the care and keeping of our national floral emblem. I do it because the rose matters.

Roses are a part of so many facets of our lives. I mean, look around. If you really check things out, you are surrounded by the rose. They appear on dishes, photographs, upholstery, clothes, shoes, wallpaper, and paintings. They are in our gardens and literally surround the landscape of our lives.

If every rose has a story, every rose grower has one too. What’s yours?

Christopher R. VanCleave is a nationally known rosarian, television personality, writer, speaker, and tireless advocate for the rose. He is the current editor of The Fragrant Rose, the American Rose Society’s free e-publication. He created the Rose Chat podcast, which has reached more than a million listeners. A resident of central Alabama, he served two terms as president of the Birmingham chapter of the American Rose Society.

(Editor’s Note: This column was originally published at www.redneckrosarian.com. It appears here with permission of Chris Van Cleave.)



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AQUATIC RESOURCES PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN

GARDENING & LANDSCAPING,

LOCAL EXTENSION AGENT SAYS

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Daily Home Correspondent

Corey Courtwright, an agent with the Talladega County Extension Office, has a passion for his work, believing that aquatic resources can significantly improve quality of life.

“I have been with the extension office since August,” he said, “but I have been in the field for 20 years or so. Most of my time was spent in Latin America, involved in Christian communities development work, going into remote areas teaching people how to grow fish to feed their families. Since being in Alabama, I have been working to learn about the state’s aquatic resources, since most of my career has been overseas.”

Courtwright defines aquatic resources as small pond management, which can involve weed issues, growing fish and protecting them from aquatic predators, erosion, or well water problems.

“Most of my calls are on small pond management, how to manage your fish populations, getting the type of fish experience you want to get out of your pond, and how to deal with aquatic weeds. People can send water samples to me, and I can do a basic water quality analysis in the office. If the matter is more complex, I send it off to another lab that has the equipment suited for that sample.”

The difference Courtwright believes his work makes in the community is helping to increase access to quality fishing for recreation, to put food on tables, to help grow fish, and a to help stretch household budgets in a tight economy.

“One of the directions I’m hoping to go with our program is to work with municipalities and county governments to help identify ponds on public land that aren’t being used for public fishing and getting them available for the public, as opposed to people having to drive long ways to get to better opportunities. This will create more accessibility across the state for everyone. I also want to focus on the consumption advisories across the state.”

According to Courtwright many of the state’s waterways have chemical contamination consumption advisories, but he’s working with the Alabama Department of Public Health to find ways to improve communication about where consumption advisories are, as well as what they mean for people fishing in those waters.



Extension agent
Corey Courtwright

In an interview with The Daily Home, Courtwright had the following to say about water use, gardening tips, spring, and fish.

Q: What is a common misconception about aquatic resources?

Courtwright: I get a lot of people that call about weed problems in their ponds or different things, and they don’t correctly identify the plant before they start to try to deal with it with chemicals. That’s one of the big issues, so before using any kind of chemical treatment, come to us at the extension office to make sure we get the correct identification. In doing so, we know that the right treatment is being applied and being applied in the right way. There are people that are making mistakes in that aspect, and it’s affecting their environment. To tackle a problem that you’re unsure about can leave you wondering, why isn’t it working? Or why the problem is getting worse.

Q: How are aquatic resources beneficial in gardening?

Courtwright: In gardening, there are some people who irrigate their garden from their pond. Those who have a pond but don’t use it for their garden should consider it. If they do have a pond around, it’ll be very resourceful to pump water from the pond to irrigate their garden in the dry times of summer. In doing so, it can also help decrease water usage on the water bill, and pond water has nutrients in it as opposed to tap water.



temperature is warming up around 60 degrees, now is the time to start developing your management plan for the rest of the summer.

Q: Is there a way to be more resourceful with water use?

Courtwright: I think landowners should do a better job in looking at the watershed they’ve got and making better use of the surface water we get in Alabama. We’re blessed with a good bit of rain. That surface water is a resource. When a big storm

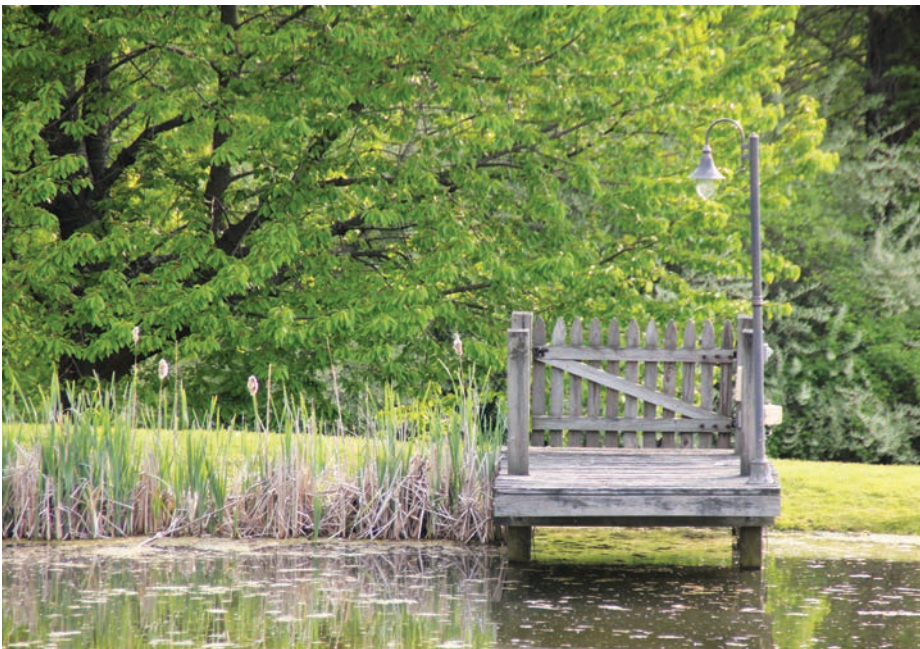
comes, we shouldn’t let it run down into the rivers and flood. It should be kept in mind to find ways to better utilize it on our landscape. Then we’ll have that water when it comes to dry times, even with just small ponds on the landscape.

Q: In the debate about farm-raised vs. wild-caught fish, which is best?

Courtwright: I think U.S farm-raised catfish is a great product. I think it’s actually one of the best products out there. So the guys here in Alabama that are growing catfish are growing a great, healthy product. I’d much prefer to eat a farm-raised fish than a wild-caught fish because you know what is in the water. You know how it’s being grown, and it takes the question out of what’s in that fish. With a wild-caught fish, it’s growing in waters that we really don’t know where it’s been and what level of chemical contamination is in that pond, or if the water quality was monitored constantly.

Q: What is another advantage of farm-raised fish?

Courtwright: Our oceans are being overharvested. We need to turn away from the wild-caught and look towards responsibly raised fish to protect the oceans. We have this idea that the oceans are huge and limitless, but we’re actually overfishing them in many circumstances. Fish farming is really the answer to provide fish for the world.



Q: What should people know about water when it comes to the spring season?

Courtwright: Now is the time to start thinking about if people are going to fertilize their ponds. As water



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A package of seeds disguised as a shipment of greeting cards.

MYSTERY SEED PACKAGES

APPEARING AGAIN IN ALABAMA

BY JUSTIN MILLER | Special to The Daily Home

Similar to reports in 2020, mystery seed packages have again found their way into some Alabama mailboxes, potentially causing great harm to the state’s environment through the spreading of diseases and invasive species.

According to the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries (ADAI), it is illegal to import or export agricultural products that do not have the proper authorization or are in violation of regulations. Known as agricultural smuggling, these packages are often disguised as shipments of such items as jewelry and greeting cards to avoid inspection.

“We urge all residents to be on the lookout for similar packages,” said Alabama Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries Rick Pate. “These seeds may be invasive to Alabama plants or be harmful to livestock. Our staff is working diligently to keep Alabama’s citizens and agriculture safe.”

It is imperative for recipients of unsolicited seeds to not plant the seeds and not open sealed packages. Alabama Cooperative Extension System county offices statewide will serve as drop-off locations for unsolicited seed packages. Extension staff will coordinate proper pickup and disposal with the ADAI.

According to David Russell, an assistant Extension professor who specializes in invasive-plant management, these seeds could be plant species that would be invasive to Alabama.

“Alabama’s climate is suitable for a wide range of plant species to establish and grow,” he said. “Seed from unsolicited sources like this should never be planted, because some could have invasive potential like cogongrass, kudzu, or

Chinese privet that aggressively spread.” Invasive species, both flora and fauna, can threaten the environment in several ways. These include things like hybridization with native species, altering ecological processes and reducing productivity of forests, rangeland and cropland.

Once established, invasive species cost a great deal of time and money to manage and control. They can also reduce native biodiversity and wildlife habitats, limit land access for recreation and cause harm to humans and livestock.

In addition to the invasive species risk, Kassie Conner, an Alabama Extension plant pathologist, warns that these packages could also harbor harmful diseases and other plant pathogens.

“Plant pathogens, including fungi, bacteria, viruses and nematodes, can be transmitted through seed,” Conner said. “They can be inside the seed, on the outside of the seed or be present in the seed lot without obvious damage.”

By planting these seeds, people could unintentionally introduce a plant disease to their garden. Depending on the pathogen and the plant species, one infected seed planted in an otherwise healthy garden can cause complete yield loss.

“Once introduced, diseases are difficult to control,” Conner said. “Many can survive anywhere from one to more than 10 years in the environment. Some can survive for longer than that.”

These seed packets also bring the potential risk of introducing invasive insects to Alabama’s environment.

“These seed packets may contain invasive insect eggs or larva that have been feeding upon the seeds during transport,” said Meredith Shrader, an Extension entomologist. “We do not want to inadvertently introduce new potential



State agriculture officials are warning residents not to open any mysterious seed packages they may receive in the mail. The seeds may introduce invasive species, diseases, and even harmful insects if planted.

pest species into the U.S. by opening these packets. Please keep the seed packets sealed and report them properly.”

For more information, read the ADAI press release at www.agi.alabama.gov or contact the Talladega or St. Clair Extension offices. Contact information is available at www.aces.edu.



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BY CHRISTOPHER R. VANCLEAVE
Special to The Daily Home

Most stores sell roses already growing in containers ranging in size from 1 to 3 gallons. Always purchase the best looking plant they have, even if it doesn't have any blooms. Heavy fertilizers can force a bloom, but a good root system is essential.

You can spot a healthy rose by observing its bright green foliage and having a minimum of three canes that are at least the diameter of a #2 pencil. If this is not the case, it is best to move on.

Please, please do not purchase roses that are sold in bags. They spray the canes with paraffin wax that is meant to preserve the shrub in transit, but by the time you get it home, it is so debilitated that it will not survive. A few have reported luck with these, but for me, it has always been an exercise in futility.

- WHAT YOU NEED:**
- Shovel
 - Trowel
 - Garden soil
 - Composted manure
 - Healthy container-grown rose

- STEP 1**
- Prepare the hole**
- Dig the hole at least 6" – 8" deeper and wider than the container that the rose was growing in.
- STEP 2**
- Conduct a drainage test**
- Pour a gallon of water in the hole. If the water dissipates within an hour, you are good to go. If the water does not drain, you have some options:
- A. Dig deeper 8" – 12" and fill up the space with garden soil and pine bark mulch nuggets to promote drainage away from the roots.
 - B. Select another spot with better drainage.
 - C. Consider a raised bed to grow your rose in.

- STEP 3**
- Plant your rose**
- Planting Tip:* For easier removal from the container, do not water the rose a day or so before planting. You don't want the soil to collapse when you remove it. You will be watering the rose once planted.
- Using equal parts garden soil and composted manure, place a few handfuls into the bottom of the hole. Carefully remove your rose from the container, loosen the root ball at the base a little to expose some of the roots, and then place the root ball in the hole. The top of the root ball should be even with the ground. If not, pull the root ball out and add more manure/soil mixture until it is at the top. This is especially important for roses growing on their own roots. If you plant below that level, it could smother the plant.



VanCleave filming a television segment about rose cultivation.

You have a little more leeway with grafted roses. Here in zone 8A, the winters are mild. All of my bud unions are alive and well above ground. Once placed, fill in around the root ball until the hole is completely filled. Tamp down gently and water in.

- STEP 4**
- Mulch around the rose**
- Mulch will help retain moisture where it is needed most: at the roots. It will also help to keep down weeds. I apply at least a 1" – 3" layer of mulch around all my roses.
- STEP 5**
- Watch your rose grow**
- Observe your rose as it begins to grow. Watch



Chris VanCleave with one of his winning entries in the Birmingham Rose Show.

its growth habit and cycle of bloom. You will be surprised at the joy that comes when you are able to grow your own roses. Be sure to water your rose at least once a week if it does not rain. Roses need about one inch of water a week to thrive.

A note about fertilizing: Wait until your newly planted rose begins to put out new growth before you apply additional fertilizers. I am a big fan of organic fertilizers and have used several over the years. I have found one in particular that has yielded excellent results. Haven Brand soil conditioners are awesome for feeding your roses and other garden plantings. I am not a spokesman for this product, just a satisfied customer.

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Local extension agent offers advice about pest control, plant care

BY VALLEAN JACKSON | Daily Home Correspondent

Gardening has many benefits, but to do it right, you need accurate information. “It’s easy to find good information, but it’s also very easy to find bad information,” says Jacob Turner, a home horticulture agent with the Talladega County Extension Office. “I would strongly recommend using research-based information as opposed to a random social media post or just guessing when it comes to gardening. To simply go off of an assumption or what social media shows you without proper research can lead to an unsuccessful harvest, a bad experience, and it can get discouraging. With proper research, it can be cost effective, build your confidence, and increase your chances of a successful harvest.”

Turner holds a bachelor’s degree in landscape horticulture and has been working in the landscape field for about 17 years. He has been with the Talladega County Extension Office for a little more than a year, and his love for helping people with their plants and gardens is what led him to the position. His areas of expertise include gardening, home grounds, and home pests. He covers Talladega, Bibb, Calhoun, Chilton, Cleburne, and Shelby counties.

“I believe my role makes a difference in the community because I get to help with their plant issues and give sound advice that’s backed up by scientific data, whether they have been doing stuff incorrectly or need guidance in the right direction,” Turner said. “For instance, pruning crepe myrtles properly or starting their seeds. With crepe myrtles, it’s not just about taking a chainsaw to them. There’s actually a real, proper way they should be pruned.”

In an interview with The Daily Home, Turner had the following to say about gardens, spring, and home pests.

Q: What do your work as an extension agent involve?

Turner: We have soil test kits available at the office, and I interpret those for homeowners. My main job is really adult education with workshops or phone calls. I’m accessible by phone or email most of the day, five days a week.

Q: What is your definition of a healthy garden?

Turner: If we’re talking vegetable production, then obviously I want a good bountiful harvest every time. But I think for any type of garden, if it’s weed free, aesthetically pleasing, and well-thought out, it is a good garden.

Q: With spring arriving, what are some home pests that might be arriving with the season?

Turner: We’ll be dealing with aphids soon, ants because they’re year-round, and ticks that we will see in the landscape and garden. We will also deal with tomato hornworms, obviously, on a tomato plant. Those are just a few that come to mind.

Q: Should you use chemicals to prevent pests?

Turner: I think it’s very beneficial to use certain chemicals, but we need to use them properly. I don’t consider myself organic, but I’m not a see-one-bug-and-I-have-to-spray-an insecticide-gardener either. I think you should find a comfortable level that you’re at with insects and learn how to coexist with them, not not kill them every time you see one. There are beneficial insects. So I don’t have a problem using chemicals at all. It’s just using them in moderation and at certain times.

Q: What is a good insect to have in the garden?

Turner: Ladybugs come to mind, because they’ll eat aphids.

Q: What do you hope to accomplish this year as an agent?

Turner: To educate more people on proper horticulture through workshops and conversations. As a team, we were pretty successful last year with some hydroponic workshops that we had never done before. We did three of them last year across the state and had 93 people come, and this year



Jacob Turner is a home horticulture agent with the Talladega County Extension Office.

we’ve bumped that number up to seven workshops. Hopefully that number will continue to climb in educating people in the different ways to grow things. You don’t always have to grow things in the dirt.



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WHAT TO KNOW

BEFORE BUYING ROSES FOR YOUR HOME GARDEN

BY CHRISTOPHER R. VANCELEAVE | Special to The Daily Home

With a multitude of catalogs filling up mail boxes everywhere and garden centers filing up with new roses, I am tempted to go crazy buying.

I must remind myself of a few basic things to consider before buying and ask myself what I'm looking for in a rose. Do I want large blooms on single stems? Lots of color and a multitude of blooms? How large will the rose become when it's fully mature? Is it easy care? Is it no spray?

Here are few considerations you'll surely find helpful.

- Doing your homework before you buy will save you some aggravation and disappointment.
- Do you have a sunny well draining spot to plant your rose? Six hours of full sun is good for most roses.
- I love the catalogs and mail order rose providers, but I often find their descriptions of

colors, size, and vigor are often incorrect for our particular growing zone (we're in 8a).

- If you like a rose, ask someone who grows roses about the rose. You can find a local rosarian on the American Rose Society website, www.rose.org. You can also Google the name of the rose and search for gardener reviews from real people who are growing the rose. I wouldn't be without my American Rose Society Guide For Selecting Roses. This guide is published annually based on ratings as reported from those who are growing that particular variety. I steer clear of roses that rank below 7.5.
- Run – don't walk – from bagged roses. They are sprayed with paraffin wax and almost always are poor performers.
- Always select roses bare root or potted with at least three good canes and a well-developed root system. Anything less will typically yield less than desirable results. If potted, ask yourself if the rose looks healthy. If not, move on.

Experience has taught me that a little advance planning will go a long way in selecting just the right



rose for your garden.

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FOR ROSE GARDENERS

THE RIGHT TOOLS MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE



BY CHRISTOPHER R. VANCELEAVE | Special to The Daily Home

If you grow roses, then you know that the right tools for the job are very important. Below is a list of tools that I use and have proven to be very useful to me in the garden.

PRUNERS: A good pair of pruners is a must-have for rose gardeners. Only use bypass pruners as shown here. Making a clean cut is essential when pruning and deadheading roses. Avoid Anvil type pruners for roses. They can damage your canes, as they do not make clean cuts. Jagged or uneven cuts will invite die back and disease into your garden.

LOPPERS: For larger canes, a good pair of loppers will do the trick.

SAW: A good pruning saw is essential for clearing away dead or stubbed canes that pruners and loppers cannot reach.

RAKE: I prefer a small flexible rake for cleaning up in between my roses. Keeping your rose beds clean is one of the hallmarks of a disease free rose garden.

SHOVEL: I am forever moving, removing or planting roses. A sturdy round pointed shovel sure makes the job easier.

SCISSORS: Once you've done all that work outside, it's time to cut some blooms and enjoy your roses. A good pair of floral scissors will help make arranging easier. I use mine to cut stems and remove greenery. Keep them rapier sharp for clean cuts.

SHARPENER: Speaking of keeping your tools sharp, no gardener should be without a good sharpener to keep your pruners and scissors in optimum cutting condition.

The tools depicted here are all tools that I have used in my garden. I have found Corona Tools USA to produce reliable products of good quality and to be a good value. To learn more about the tools pictured here, visit www.coronatools.com.

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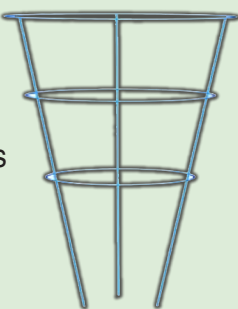
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THE SERENITY & PEACE

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Local master gardener discusses the benefits of time spent outdoors with your plants

BY VALLEAN JACKSON | Daily Home Correspondent

Barbara Bishop is a local master gardener who has been gardening for more than 50 years. Her areas of expertise are flowers and vegetables. She is a native of city life, but about 10 years ago on a whim, she and her husband moved to Lincoln and have no plans to go back.

“Since being in Lincoln, I have had so much room to garden,” she said. “Before, my gardens were about the size of a postage stamp, and now I have about an acre and a half to garden on. I would say that it was probably around my 40s when I realized that this was more than just a hobby. It was a couple of houses ago that we had a backyard that had a brick wall around it, and by the time we were done with it, it looked like a New Orleans courtyard. That is when I learned that I truly love gardening.”

Over the years, Bishop has experienced her fair share of trial and error when it comes to gardening. She has perfected some things, learned some new things, but in becoming a master gardener, gained more confidence in what she plants. She says that the program has given her “a lot of confidence” in the seeds she starts and helped her to recognize the things she might have done wrong in the past.

“For a long time, I was on the two-for-one plan,” she said. “I would buy one to live and one to die. Since becoming a master gardener, I don’t do that nearly as much. Most of what I’m buying now is living. That makes a huge difference, and it’s given me the resource to go to find out what is wrong. When I have a certain insect that’s all over my plants and eating them up or something is dying or not growing well, those resources help. Prior to the program, I did not have that knowledge.

The Extension Master Gardener Program is a volunteer program that helps individuals advance in the skill and art of gardening. Bishop said that it has taught her “so much,” adding that she nothing about the benefits of soil testing before enrolling in the program. She had never tested her soil before, but has now and understands



the importance behind the science of having it tested.

“I discovered a fabulous place to volunteer, have made some great friends, and wouldn’t take anything away from the experience,” she said. “I feel like my role in volunteering in the community is so beneficial because I enjoy being able to help others learn to grow the flowers they want. One of the places I volunteer is at Rainbow Omega in Eastaboga, and they have nine greenhouses. The chance to work with them and see the enjoyment and peace it brings them in gardening just fills me with so much joy and is so rewarding.”

In an interview with The Daily Home, Bishop had the following to say about the master gardener program,

while also offering some gardening tips.

Q: What is a Master Gardener?
Bishop: It is someone who is in pursuit of gardening knowledge, someone who wants to go the extra mile with their gardening skills and knowledge in what they’re doing, and sharing that knowledge. It lets you volunteer and get out and work with people who are not gardening. It helps you to teach other people and get out in the gardening world a lot more.

Q: How does someone enroll in the program?
Bishop: We have a class starting in the fall. It will be for several counties, and Extension Agent Jacob Turner will be teaching. The registration opens in August, and those interested can go to

the extension website or just call the Talladega County Extension Office. Classes run until about the end of October, if I’m not mistaken. It’s a 14-week course. Then in the first year, 50 volunteer hours have to be completed, and once that’s done, you are no longer an intern and receive your master gardener’s certification.

Q: What are some benefits of gardening?
Bishop: First off, the fruits and vegetables that you get from your garden are a lot healthier and you know what’s going in it when you put it on your table. You don’t know what’s in it when you go to the grocery store. Then the serenity and the peace it offers is worth more than you’ll ever know. When I go out into my





Master gardener Barbara Bishop

flower garden, it's just like going into a little piece of heaven. I'm in my own little world and I can stay out there all day long.

Q: What is something fascinating that you discovered while gardening one day?

Bishop: The bees, butterflies, and all the little creatures that are in my garden are just amazing. I have a huge patio on my house that my husband and I built. A couple of years ago, I planted snapdragons in a pot on the patio, and now I have this one little snapdragon that comes up every year between the cracks on my patio, and that is absolutely fascinating. That little snapdragon has a quarter of an inch to come up between, and it's beautiful.

Q: What has been your favorite thing to grow?

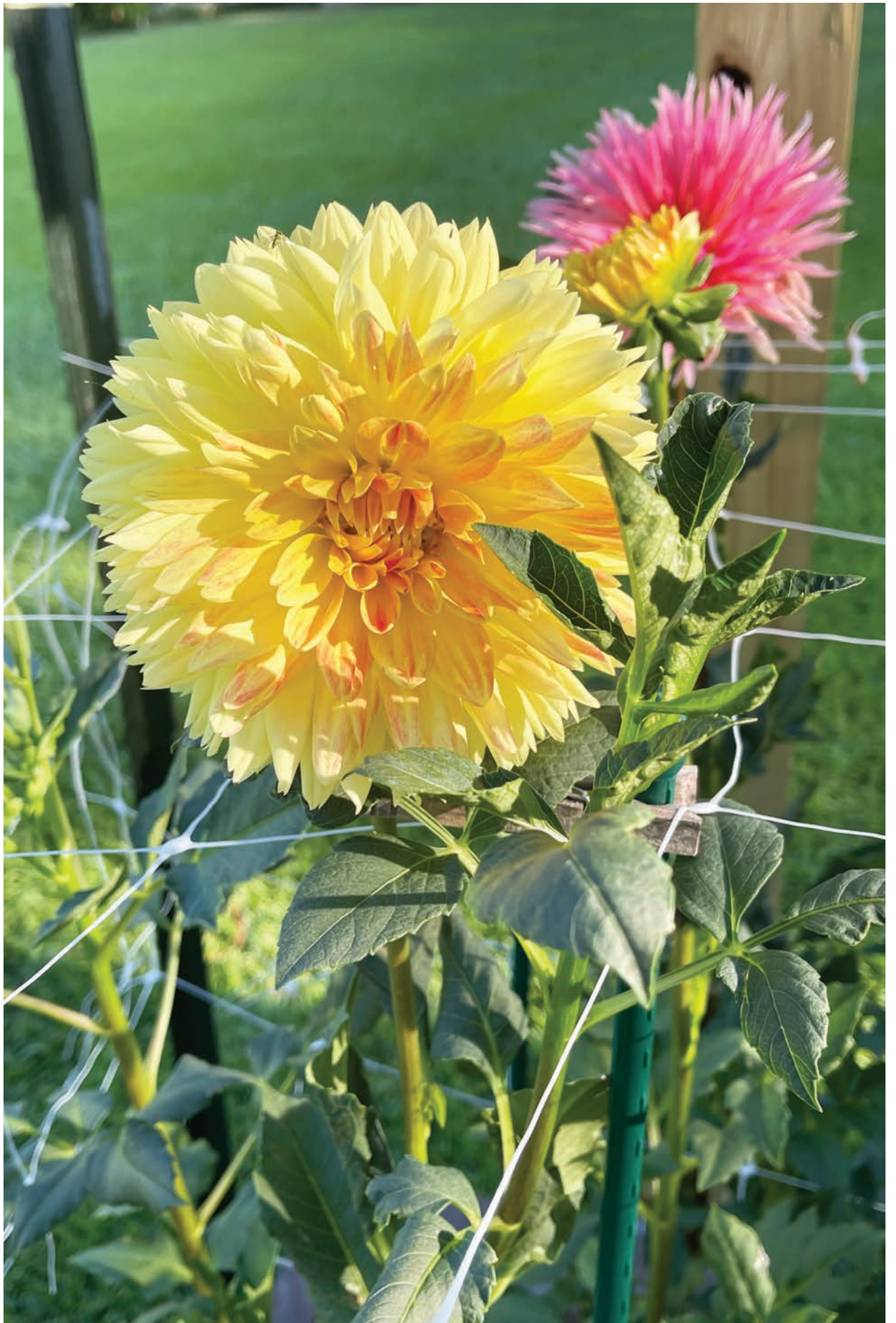
Bishop: Dahlias. I probably have about 200.

Q: What is garden maintenance for you?

Bishop: My husband. He does about as much of the maintenance as I do, but he jokes and says that I'm going to have to stop planting so much. But I pull weeds constantly, constantly shred leaves, and put them in a pile to use for compost. It is a lot of work, but it is so worth all of it.

Q: What advice would you give to gardeners who are just beginning?

Bishop: Don't stop! Don't get frustrated and say you can't do this. My sister does that all the time, and I'll go over and cut something back for her, add some fertilizer, and it comes right back. You can always find something that you love in the garden. Just feed that passion.



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Social media influencer Brian Brigantti also talks gardening on YouTube, Instagram

BY VALLEAN JACKSON | Daily Home Correspondent

Brian Brigantti’s road to becoming the TikTok sensation he is today (with 3.4 million followers, and influencer status on such topics as eco-friendly living, gardening, and self sufficiency) blossomed from a viral video offering tips about chickens and eggs that he believed would help farmers.

“The idea to post the video came about from raising my chickens,” he recalls. “We had about 13 chickens, after downsizing from like 28 chickens. Our chickens laid an egg every single day, and we were not eating that many eggs. It was an abundance of eggs, and I didn’t want the eggs to spoil from just sitting out. So a really good way to recycle the eggs is to clean them, cook the eggs, scramble them with the eggshells, and feed the scrambled eggs back to the chicken. That gives them everything they need to make more eggs. All of the nutrients give them back calcium, fats, and proteins. So I made a video doing exactly that, and it went crazy. The vegans were pissed. People were like, ‘What is going on here? This is cannibalism.’ They were like, ‘How could you do this?’ However, it is very common if you have a farm and raise chickens. It’s their egg, but it’s not like you’re feeding them one that’s been fertilized. Still, that video went viral.”



Brian Brigantti

Brigantti, the owner of Red Leaf Ranch, is a gardener, content creator (as @RedleafRanch), and author. His chickens and eggs video received about 8 million views, which helped to further his reach with his gardening videos.

Country life and gardening weren’t always his passion. Before becoming a social media influencer, he was pursuing a career in photography. However, the hustle and bustle of New York life was becoming too overwhelming. When the opportunity presented itself to move to Tennessee to help his partner, he saw it as a new beginning.

“When the pandemic hit, you know, I wasn’t able to travel for my photography anymore, and there was all this growing uncertainty of what our food system was going to look like,” he says. “I saw my partner having all this fun in the garden and decided to give it a try. My focus was to grow food and make sure we would survive. The first thing I ever planted was kale. I planted like 20 to 30 little kale plants, and most of them died, but it was fun to do. After that, I fell so deeply in love with gardening. We literally started a whole vegetable garden, because I had the time. I wasn’t traveling anymore. I devoted all of my

energy to the garden, went all in, and I never looked back. A year later, I started sharing it on social media, and it just exploded. I’m still shocked at how big it’s gotten. I’m so grateful that my life revolves around something that I love so deeply.”

Brigantti credits that his success to letting go of a specific definition of success. It was through failures that he grew and learned the most. For instance, his first attempt to grow kale. He said he thought kale was an easy plant, but at first attempt, he killed more than half of them. Along the way he learned that the kale just needed more spacing, instead of planting them so close to each other that each plant competed with one another. In spacing them out, they could grow to their fullest potential and have room to breathe and grow.

“I mainly grow vegetables, but the more I learned about gardening, it is so important to create biodiversity in a garden,” he says. “You need that diversity for wildlife to thrive in that space. If you can create an ecosystem within your garden, it can get to a point where your garden can literally take care of itself because you’ll have such a thriving ecosystem. So I’ve definitely ventured into perennials, flowers, trees, shrubs, and planting whatever I want now.”

When asked when he realized that gardening is his passion, he said when he first broke ground and felt dirt in his hands for the first time. He knew that it was what he was meant to do. Gardening has helped him to come home, in a sense, to who he is and to know that he is exactly where he needs to be.

“I feel like what we should be really actively

seeking is not money or a career. It’s finding the things that make you feel like a kid again. Find things that bring you the kind of joy and excitement that you felt when you were a kid, and gardening was that for me. More people need to garden more than ever, to connect with mother nature. She is going to get us through the darkest of times.”

In an exclusive interview with The Daily Home, Brigantti answered the following questions.

Q: How important is research before you plant?

Brigantti: I’d say it’s about 25 percent research and 75 percent doing. In the beginning, I didn’t really do much research. Like with the kale, I learned along the way how to grow it, and making mistakes along the way really solidified the teaching and lessons. I like to go about my way of learning, which is to actually practice what you’re trying to learn. So I say get out there, do it, and don’t let yourself get caught up in trying to absorb or learn too much. Let the best teacher be practicing and learning as you go.

Q: What are the essentials of gardening?

Brigantti: I don’t want to say good tools, because with your hands, you have all the tools you need. On a technical level, you need good soil, and that doesn’t necessarily have to be a raised bed. You can make good dirt. There are so many affordable, cost-effective, labor-effective ways to make good soil. To start a garden, I feel like the affordability of it is what hinders a lot of people from starting, but gardening is only as expensive as you want it to be. Next, I would say having the right mindset when gardening, because you don’t want to put too much pressure on things to be perfect. Nature always has her own

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plans. Lastly, just remind yourself to have fun and allow yourself to be present in the experience, don't give up, and keep trying. Luckily in gardening, if you kill something, there's compost. You can just throw it in the compost, and your failure literally becomes a part of your success.

Q: What is the most important thing to you as a gardener?

Brigantti: I feel like that's a hard question to answer, because gardening can't just be defined by one thing. It's about everything and everyone around you. A garden does not thrive without community and diversity.

Q: How have you used gardening to make a difference in your community?

Brigantti: A few of the reasons the ranch is available to the public is because it gives people a place to come visit, a place to disconnect from the world, and somewhere to learn how to grow food. We're cultivating a lot of really special things here, and I feel like the greatest joy in it is the ability to share it with the people in our community. So twice a year we have an open house where people come and tour the gardens and greenhouses. My mom brings out the grill, and we cook food for people with things from the garden. It's an overall beautiful experience, and I love to inspire and share in that way. This also helps me to be able showcase what is possible. Our goal is to eventually become a botanical garden or something similar to a retreat.

Q: Do you think you would have been successful with gardening if you had stayed in New York, or even Chicago?

Brigantti: No, not in the slightest. There's just nowhere to grow there, but being here feels like it is exactly where I was meant to be and doing what I was meant to do. Everything I do now feels so intentional, purposeful, less stressful, and even more affordable. In New York, it was literally paycheck to paycheck, but that has been overcome, and that relief has helped me so much. This is why I just feel like everything aligned perfectly.

Q: What is your favorite thing to grow?

Brigantti: Last season, it was definitely squash. I loved growing squash. It is such a fun plant to grow, it gets huge, and it gives you so much abundance. Then there's my love for tomatoes. They're really a special plant to grow. They require a lot more care, but you really build a relationship with the plant. There is nothing that compares to having a tomato right off the vine. It is so good! It's like the best way to have a tomato, if you ask me. Then what's really fun about growing your own food is you're able to grow a lot of unique varieties opposed to what's sold in the grocery stores. On average, we are only exposed to at most six varieties of tomatoes, when there are literally over 10,000 varieties of tomatoes, each with their own flavor profile, juiciness, level of acidity, and texture.

Q: What has been your most fascinating discovery while gardening?

Brigantti: When you garden, you're not just planting what you want to eat, but you're creating a home for so many creatures. I'll never forget



the day I was going out into the garden and I was growing corn. I looked at my corn and through the leaves to make sure she was doing okay. I peeled back one of the leaves and there was this little tree frog just nestled in between the leaf and the corn. It was the cutest thing I had ever seen. Frogs are one of the greatest indicators that you have a healthy ecosystem. So to see that in my garden was like, 'Oh my God, I'm doing something right, and my garden is happy.' To see all the types of creatures is wild. I see birds making nests in the trees around my garden, toads hopping around burrowing themselves in the soil, different kinds of butterflies, and bees. It's just so beautiful. I literally feel like Snow White.

Q: What does garden maintenance look like for you?

Brigantti: There are quite a few things, when the garden season hits and we're in peak season, that I like to stay on top of. That includes hand-watering everything, because I don't have an irrigation system by choice. I prefer to hand-water because I like to take care of every single plant individually. I feel like if I had an irrigation system, it would kind of make me a little lazy. I like checking in with my plants and being present. With me taking the time to hand-water, it also allows me to check for any dying leaves, unwanted pests, if pruning needs to happen, and assess for any extra limbs that are getting unsightly out of control. There's also fertilizing to make sure

my plants are well fed, because you don't just plant them and leave them. Once they start producing fruit, it takes nutrients and energy to grow those fruits. So you have to replenish that energy, just like us. Harvesting is definitely a form of maintenance as well, because you don't want anything rotten in the garden. Rotten things tend to attract a whole slew of issues that you want to try your best to avoid.

Q: Have you been surprised by the response to any particular video you've posted?

Brigantti: One of the most viral videos I've ever had was me grilling a sunflower. I harvested a sunflower head right off the stalk, and it was a huge head, like maybe like a foot across. You harvest them young so the seeds are soft, clean it, season it, and you literally put it on the grill and grill the sunflower. That video went crazy! It was like, 'Why are you eating a sunflower like that? I've never seen that.' That's where sunflower seeds come from. It really just shows how disconnected from our food system we are, like 'Y'all really didn't know sunflowers seeds came from sunflowers?' It was just eye-opening. When you harvest the sunflower, every seed on the sunflower head is actually attached to an individual small flower, and you have to take those off to reveal the seeds.

Q: What led to you releasing your first book geared towards gardening?

Brigantti: My intention with the book was to give people a guide to cultivating abundance, not just in their garden but in their life as well. Working in the garden over the past few years has just reminded me time and time again that the way we nurture our gardens is literally how we should be nurturing ourselves. We should be taking the time to water ourselves, cut out things in our lives that feel toxic, or that are not serving us anymore. We should uproot ourselves and repot ourselves in spaces where we feel seen and we have more spaces to grow. So my intention with the book was to give people the confidence to lead them to a light of abundance inside the garden and in their life as well. "Gardening for Abundance" is available on our website, redleafbranch.com, and it'll show you all the places you can purchase it.

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GRACE GARDEN DESIGNS

PRODUCES UNIQUE HOME DECOR ITEMS

BY VALLEAN JACKSON | Daily Home Correspondent

Pell City native Madeleine Moore was introduced to gardening by her grandmothers. Her maternal grandmother also taught her how to sew, and the combination of both skills eventually led to the start of her business.

“The pandemic gave me the time I needed to thrive in creativity, but what happened that birthed Grace Garden Designs in a sense is my love for animals and a placemat that wouldn’t stay on the table,” she said. “I had a placemat sitting on the table one day, and at the time I had a cat and seven dogs. The placemat kept getting knocked off my table, so it would always end up on my floor. I loved the placemat, but I was so tired of picking it up off my floor. So I sewed a back onto it, stuffed it with some poly-fil, and made it a pillow. That is how Grace Gardens was born.”

Pillows were Moore’s go-to design, at the beginning and a pillow is the first thing she sold. Then the business evolved into rice warmer therapy packs that can be frozen or heated for pain or discomfort relief, custom vinyl designs, t-shirts, digital designs, hand-sewn items, keepsakes, weighted therapy packs, resume writing, editing, voicemail signs, and photography.

“The boundaries are limitless for me when it comes to my creations and fulfilling people’s



Madeleine Moore



needs,” she said. “I make a lot of home decor in the realm of signs and visual decor for the wall. One of my most favorite personalized things to do is taking a video or voice snippet, putting it into a QR code, put that into a sound wave, and create a sign where somebody can scan the code and hear or see a memory of their loved one who is no longer here. I truly believe that it’s really cool and definitely a one-of-a-kind piece to have in your home.”

Moore believes that her business is a way to bring people together and that it makes a difference because she is offering unique items that can spark joy.

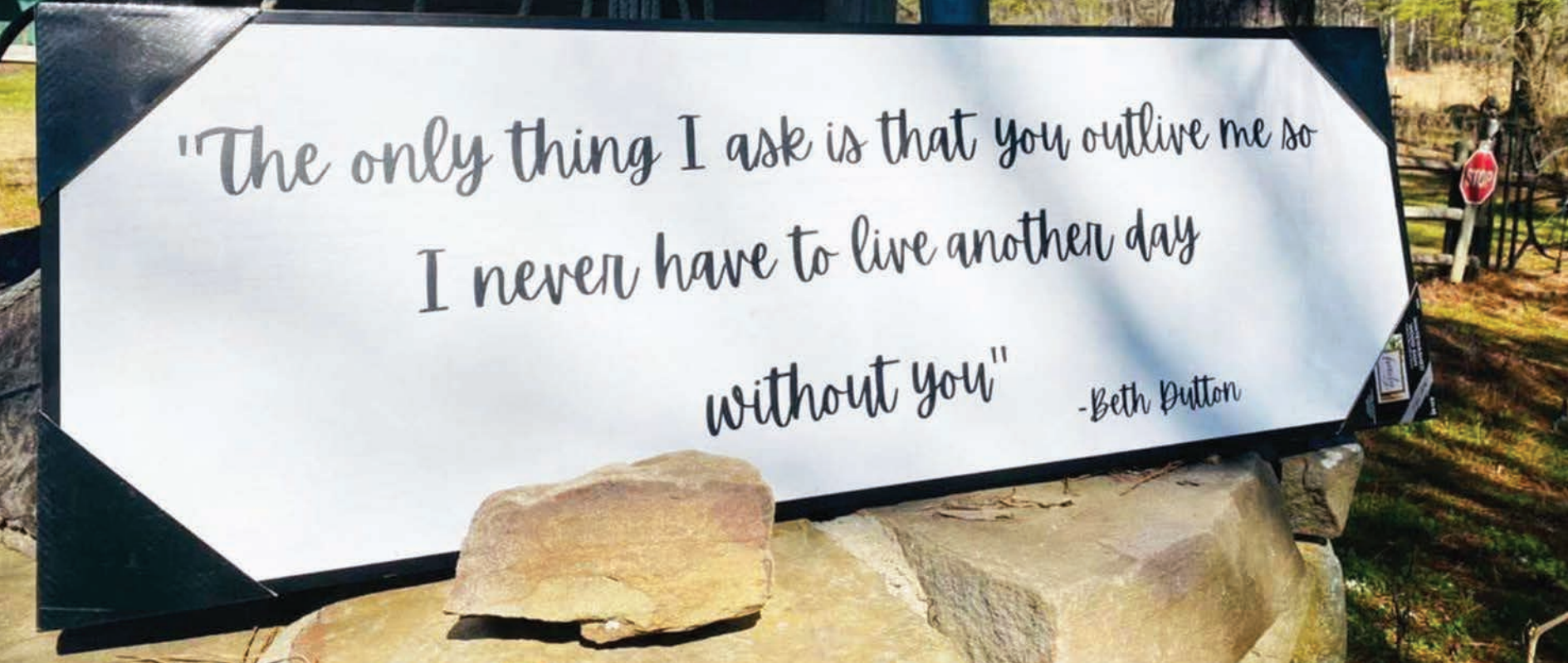
“My goal with each customer is to make the design happen for them even if it is something someone has never done before,” she said. “I will work with them until we get it right. I am not satisfied unless they’re satisfied. I try my best to be really personal and intentional with what my clients are seeking.”

The Pell City native now resides in Georgia with her husband but maintains a strong local customer base. When asked how she determines

what to create, she says that her ideas are often need-based. For instance, the rice warmers she created – and which have become one of her most popular products – stemmed from her family being prone to back and neck problems. She saw a need for heating pads but wasn’t fond of the ones that plug into the wall because they get too hot, and she decided to make an alternative that was more natural.

“My paternal grandmother used to have a similar method for a solution, but she used beans, and it was like some fabric with beans inside. I remember growing up there was always this unique smell when it came out of the freezer, and it wasn’t a bad smell, just a unique one. So when the decision to use this method came about, I did some research and discovered that rice keeps better, the heat from the microwave minus the moisture will keep it fresh, the freezer keeps it fresh, and it will only have to be replaced every few years. The rice also absorbs essential oils well.”

Moore considers her greatest reward as a small business owner to be seeing the joy when a client gets a product that they’re really pleased





with. Grace Garden Designs can be found on Facebook or reached through email at gracegardendesigns@gmail.com. It offers shipping and in person delivery to St. Clair County.

Moore answered the following questions in a recent interview with The Daily Home.

Q: What are your ties to Pell City?

Moore: My family has in Pell City since my grandparents’ generation, so my maiden name has been around for some time. My granddad was really big into the automotive scene, we had a farm once, and my dad, mother, brother, and myself are all graduates of Pell City High School. The majority of my life was spent in Pell City until we were college age.

Q: Why the name Grace Garden Designs?

Moore: My middle name is Grace, and I feel like the word Garden was a really good analogy to biblical references and how beautiful everything can be. Then Designs just really encompasses everything I do. I definitely feel like a jill-of-all-trades.

Q: How does you business continue to serve Pell City even though you live in another state?

Moore: My mom is a hairstylist in Pell City, and I sometimes put my therapy packs and pillows in her salon. People often ask about them when they go into the salon to get their hair done. Then a lot of my former teachers will go in and get their hair done and say, ‘Oh, how’s Madeleine doing?’ And so that kind of keeps it alive. If they see something on the shelves there, it brings people to my page and then people are like,

‘Oh, those rice warmers remind me I need to get a new one,’ or ‘Hey, I need to get one of these for my friend.’ Word of mouth is everything, and that’s how I try to keep it alive.”



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As the weather begins to warm and days get longer, it's important to begin preparing your yard for a healthy growing season. While factors like climate, soil type and grass type can all impact how your yard grows, there are a few steps you can take during the spring months to help your lawn thrive.

From dethatching and aerating to fertilizing and mowing, tackling these simple chores can help ensure your yard looks its best and is prepared to fight off seasonal weeds, disease and drought.

TUNE YOUR MOWER

Before it's time for the first mowing of the season, inspect your mower and perform any routine maintenance necessary. That goes beyond sharpening, or replacing, the blade, and includes changing the oil, spark plugs and filter as well as filling with a fresh tank of gas.

LOOSEN THE THATCH LAYER

While it's important to avoid working on your lawn until after the final freeze to avoid damaging the

grass, raking your yard with a spring tine rake to loosen thatch – the layer of leaves, roots and dead grass that builds up between live grass and soil – before the first mow is equally important. Be sure to rake when the soil is dry; if it's too soft or muddy, you may pull up healthy grass crowns.

COMBAT COMPACTED SOIL

If your soil has become compacted – likely the effect of heavy foot traffic – and is too dense for water, air and other nutrients to reach the roots of your grass, aerating can help break it up and reduce thatch. A core, or plug, aerator can introduce tiny holes into your soil by removing plugs of grass and soil, which lets nutrients more easily reach the roots. An added bonus, the plugs can decompose on top of your grass, supplying more nutrients.

FILL IN BARE SPOTS

If your lawn is looking sparse, overseeding, which involves spreading grass seed over your existing lawn, can help fill in bare spots. Be sure to choose the right type of seed for your climate and soil type to ensure proper



growth. Applying a slow-release nitrogen fertilizer at the same time can provide additional nutrients that are important for promoting healthy growth.

START SEASONAL MOWING

When the ground is dry enough and your grass is long enough to require cutting, begin seasonal

mowing. Be sure to use proper techniques, including varying your mowing direction each time to avoid creating patterns or ruts, and avoid cutting grass too low, which can make the lawn more susceptible to weeds and drought stress. In general, never remove more than one-third of the grass blade at a time.



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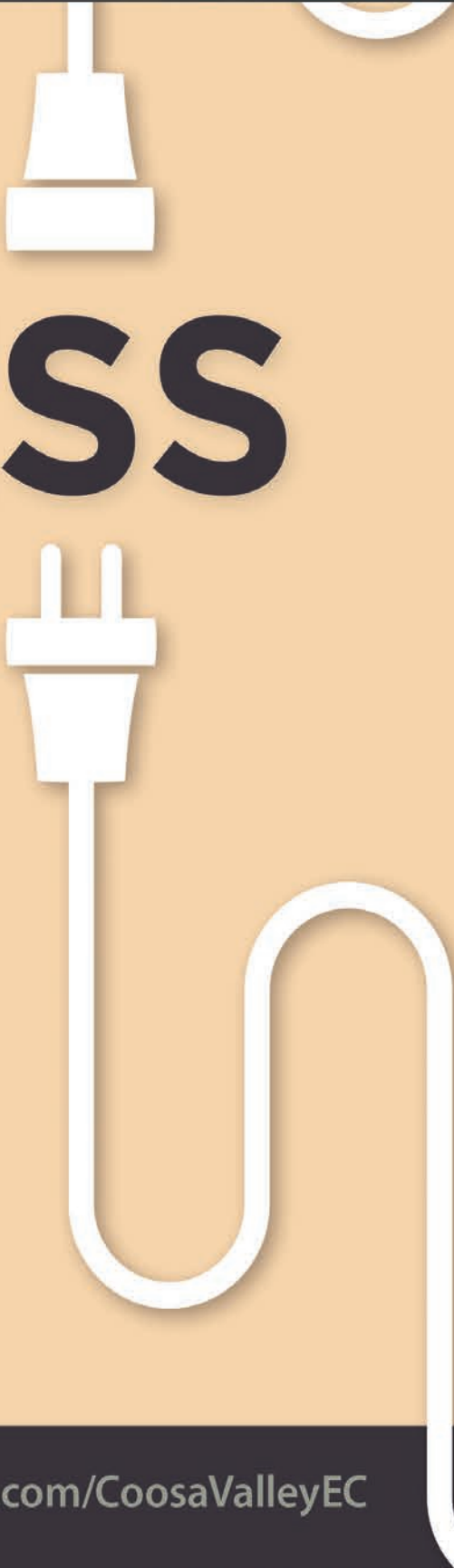
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ATTRACT BACKYARD BIRDS

WITH THE RIGHT SEEDS

While almost all bird seed may look pretty much the same to you, it doesn't to the birds you're feeding. Knowing what kinds of seeds different birds like can help you attract a variety of fine feathered friends to your feeders.

Consider these popular seed types and the common backyard birds they attract:

Sunflower – Black sunflower seeds attract blue jays, goldfinches, woodpeckers, purple finches, chickadees, titmice and nuthatches.

Striped sunflower seeds appeal to chickadees, doves, grosbeaks, northern cardinals, nuthatches, titmice and woodpeckers. Sunflower hearts (also known as "hulled sunflower" and "sunflower chips") attract chickadees, common redpolls, juncos, doves, finches, goldfinches, grosbeaks, nuthatches, pine siskins, titmice and woodpeckers.

Nyjer – These lightweight, tiny seeds are a favorite of goldfinches. Put nyjer seeds in a hanging feeder with tiny holes so the small seeds won't get blown away. Nyjer also attracts

redpolls, juncos, doves, indigo bunting and pine siskin.

Safflower – These white seeds are slightly smaller than black sunflower seeds. Because they are bitter, grackles, blue jays, starlings – and squirrels – don't like them. However, they do attract doves, purple finches, chickadees, titmice and downy woodpeckers.

White millet – Good for scattering on the ground, white millet attracts ground feeders such as juncos, sparrows, indigo buntings, towhees and mourning doves.

Cracked corn – Popular with ground feeders, cracked corn appeals to doves, crows, jays, sparrows, juncos and towhees. Avoid getting finely cracked corn as it's vulnerable to rot and can quickly turn to mush.

When choosing a bird seed mix, pay attention to the ingredients list on the package. Bird seed is required by law to list ingredients in order of content. Some cheaper mixes have filler seeds such as wheat, red milo, red millet or "assorted grain products." Most backyard birds won't eat those, and your seed mix could end up wasted on the ground.

GO GREEN

WITH HOME CLEANERS

If you're among those looking for ways to clean your home while also going green, it may be easier than you think.

Consider these easy and affordable solutions to help you live more environmentally friendly. You may be surprised to find you already have many of these household products on hand.

Baking soda: A natural, safe, effective and gentle solution, baking soda can serve multiple home cleaning needs. Make a paste of three parts baking soda to one part water. Rub onto silver with a clean cloth or sponge. Rinse thoroughly and dry for shining serving or decor pieces. Additionally, you can sprinkle baking soda on upholstery and carpet to get

rid of odors.

Vinegar: With the acidity to help get rid of dirt and grime around the home, vinegar can be used to clean cloudy glassware. Simply soak paper towels or a cloth in full-strength white distilled vinegar and wrap around both the inside and outside of the glass. Let sit before rinsing clean. To remove lime deposits on your tea kettle, add 1/2 cup distilled white vinegar to the water and let it sit overnight. In the morning, boil the vinegar for a few minutes then rinse with water.

Lemons: With a fresh, natural smell, lemons have the acidity to remove soap scum, clean and shine brass and remove hard water deposits. Just spray some lemon juice on tile surfaces to remove soap scum or hard



water deposits. Squeeze lemon juice on a cloth and use to polish brass around the home.

Houseplants: Plants serve as natural air purifiers. African violets and ferns are beautiful ways to help clear the air.

Other easy, green ideas for keeping your home clean include opening windows and doors while you clean to improve air quality and taking off your shoes when you come inside, which can help avoid tracking dust, dirt, pollen and more throughout the house.

A HOW-TO GUIDE

FOR DEEP CLEANING YOUR GRILL

A clean grill can enhance the flavor of your food, making regular grill maintenance an essential part of your outdoor cooking routine.

Grills, especially those exposed to the elements, can accumulate dirt, rust and food residue that can

affect performance and safety. Plus, residual char and grease can impart unwanted flavors and even lead to flare-ups.

Once you've gathered the right tools – a sturdy grill brush with stainless steel bristles, a scraper, a bucket of soapy water, microfiber cloths and grill cleaner or degreaser – consult this step-

by-step guide to keep your grill in pristine condition, ensuring delicious meals every time.

1. Preheat the grill for 15 minutes to loosen any stuck-on residue then turn it off and let it cool slightly.
2. Ensure the gas supply is turned off before cleaning.

3. Remove the grates and scrub them thoroughly with a grill brush and warm, soapy water. Rinse and let dry.
4. Clean burners by wiping them with a damp cloth.
5. Scrape the inside of the grill to remove any debris and use a vacuum to collect loose dirt and ash.
6. Wipe down the exterior of the grill with a microfiber cloth and grill cleaner.
7. Reassemble the grill once all parts are dry and give it a final wipe down.

In between deep cleanings, remember



to clean your grill grates immediately after cooking while they are still warm to remove food particles and grease. Find more tips for the grill and beyond at eLivingtoday.com.



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