WASHINGTON COUNTY
UTEXTENSION
INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE
THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

The Trusty Trowel
Late Winter 2026

Upcoming FREE Classes *Registration Required*

Dormant Pruning Caneberries, Blueberries and Grapes

February 25th Wednesday 6:00pm, Webinar only

Join UT Extension Washington County Agriculture Agent Adam Watson and learn how to prune your small fruits.

Zoom registration: https://tiny.utk.edu/smallfruitpruning

Pruning Fruit Trees

March 5th Thursday 6:00 pm

Join UT Extension Washington County Agriculture Agent Adam Watson to learn how to prune your fruit trees to improve yields and enhance fruit quality.

In-person Location: Jonesborough Farm Bureau Basement Meeting room 1103 Boones Creek Rd, Jonesborough.

Zoom webinar registration: https://tiny.utk.edu/fruittreepruning

In-person Registration: https://tiny.utk.edu/inpersontreepruning

Hands on Fruit Tree Pruning @ Tipton-Haynes

March 7th Saturday 10am,

Tipton-Haynes State Historic Site 2620 South Roan Street Johnson City, TN 37601

Meet inside the Visitors center. We'll have a hands-on apple tree pruning demonstration and time for questions.

In-person Registration:
https://tiny.utk.edu/TiptonHaynespruning

Improving Garden Soils

March 31st, 2026 Tuesday 6:00 pm

Join UT Extension Washington County Agriculture Agent Adam Watson and learn about one of the most important parts of your garden it's soil. We'll discuss fertilizers, amendments, and why clay soils aren't as bad as some people think. Note location for in person!

In-person Registration: https://tiny.utk.edu/inpersongardensoil

Zoom registration: https://tiny.utk.edu/gardensoil

The Trusty Trowel-Late Winter 2026

It's A Seedy Time of Year

If you're like many who read this newsletter you've been scrutinizing seed catalogs and websites to see what you might plant in the garden this year. If you're new to gardening, or even if you are experienced, you may see some jargon that is less than clear about what it means. Let's look at a few of the common phrases, you may see.

First, two well defined terms hybrid and open-pollinated. These designations are important if you plan to save seed. Hybrid seeds, aka F1, are seeds resulting from the cross of a specific mother and father plant. This cross results in the seed growing a plant with very specific characteristics. We don't save seeds from hybrid plants because the inherited mix of genes mean subsequent generations might look that either of the parental lines, the F1 hybrid, or something totally different. We do save seed from open-pollinated plants which don't have specified parents and as a rule their genetic makeup is less diverse. The greater uniformity of the genetics means that a cross of any two members of the population will yield similar offspring within a range of characteristics. This resultant seed is referred to as true to type and makes them valid candidates for saving seed.

There are other labels that are well defined such as a "certified organic seed", which refers to the fact that the seed came from a farm that meets all the requirements of the federal law that governs organic certification. Organic certification in and of itself doesn't denote a higher quality seed only the system under which it was produced.

There are other terms you will see that are less well defined. You may see the word heirloom which typically refers to those varieties that are older. Unfortunately, there's not a specific age or date of variety release that is uniformly applied. The difficulty comes that many times "heirloom" is used synonymously with open-pollinated which is not necessarily accurate. For instance, Golden Cross Bantam' hybrid sweet corn was released in 1934; at 92 years old it's definitely not out of line to call it an heirloom. Likewise 'Burpee's Big Boy'(1949), a hybrid tomato, at 77 years is justifiably an heirloom and is most definitely not open-pollinated.

You may also see a vegetable cultivar (cultivated variety) with a letter, or multiple letters, following the name. Those letters are indicating specific disease resistance for that cultivar and you should find a legend denoting what disease is referenced by the abbreviation. Tomatoes and peppers are probably the two vegetables for which we see these disease resistance abbreviations. A 'California Wonder 300 TMR' is a bell pepper which has resistance tobacco mosaic virus.

When it comes to tomatoes there are two specific terms referring to how the tomato plant grows, indeterminate and determinate. A determinate variety reaches a specified size or height and then stops growing; generally, about 4 feet. An indeterminate variety will continue to grow as long as the plant's health and season allow. The harvest period for a determinate cultivar is two to four weeks while an indeterminate cultivar can be eight weeks or longer. In theory, an indeterminate cultivar has the ability to outyield a determinate, but often disease and lack of season long fertility makes the yield difference less than one might expect. Determinate cultivars because of their smaller space demands are better for gardens limited in size.

You'll commonly find the term "bush" for many different vegetables. I would always caution that these are somewhat relative terms, and that is to say a bush cucumber would take less space than an ordinary cucumber. But understand it's the nature of a cucurbit plant to have some size to it as the vines grow. I do want to encourage you if you're going to garden in a small space, and especially containers, specifically look at those

varieties that are labeled being suited for container or pot production. They should take less room than standard varieties and work well when space is limited.

It's worth mentioning that seed from discount retailers, such as dollar stores, is often incorrectly described as being lower quality. All seed in the US must meet specific minimum standards in regards to purity and germination rates. At a discount retailer you may find limited varieties and fewer seeds in each packet. But, the seed will perform to the fullest of its ability. Don't be afraid of lower priced seed options if they will meet your needs.

Preventing Insects and Disease in the Vegetable Garden

Table 2. Suggested crop rotation.

Plant	Follow With	Do Not Follow With
Beans	Cauliflower, Cabbage, Corn	Onions, Garlic
Beets	Spinach	Chard
Cole Crops*	Beans, Onions	Tomatoes
Carrots	Lettuce, Tomatoes	Dill
Cucumbers	Peas, Radishes	Potatoes
Kale	Beans, Peas	Cole Crops*
Lettuce	Carrots, Cucumbers, Tomatoes	
Onions	Lettuce, Cole Crops*	Beans
Peas	Corn, Carrots	
Potatoes	Beans, Corn, Turnips	Tomatoes, Squash, Peppers, Eggplant
Radishes	Beans	Cole Crops*
Tomatoes	Carrots, Onions	Cole Crops*, Potatoes, Peppers, Eggplant

*Cole crops include cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, mustard greens, collards, brussel sprouts, and turnips.

Table From: A Beginner's Guide to Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky Plans and Preparations

Worried about pests in the vegetable garden this season?

Rotate where you plant each vegetable so the same crop (or crop family) doesn't return to the exact spot more than once every three years; this helps break insect and disease cycles and keeps plants healthier.

In a very small garden where moving a crop just a few feet isn't truly enough, consider skipping that crop in that area for a year or two. or grow it in a separate raised bed or container instead.

For questions about your home and garden please feel free to contact me, Adam Watson, Agriculture Extension Agent watson@utk.edu.

Washington County Extension-206 West Main Street Jonesborough, TN 37659-1230
Office Phone: **(423) 753-1680**