

Upcoming FREE Class *Registration Required*

Invasive Plants: Identification and Control

May 28, 2026, Thursday, 6:00 pm

Join UT Extension Washington County Agriculture Agent Adam Watson and learn how to identify several common invasive plants in our region. Also learn some strategies to controlling them if they are found in your garden or on your farm.

In-person attendance is encouraged as there will be numerous live samples for hands-on study. In-person

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

In-person Registration: <https://tiny.utk.edu/inpersoninvasive>

Zoom registration: <https://tiny.utk.edu/invasive>

Houseplants!

It's that time of year when houseplants are poised to come into their own. If you're like me "house" plants is a bit of misnomer as many of my plants stay outdoors during the late spring through to early fall. The quantity and quality of light that they receive outside is tremendously better than I can achieve keeping them indoors given my less-than-ideal window exposure.

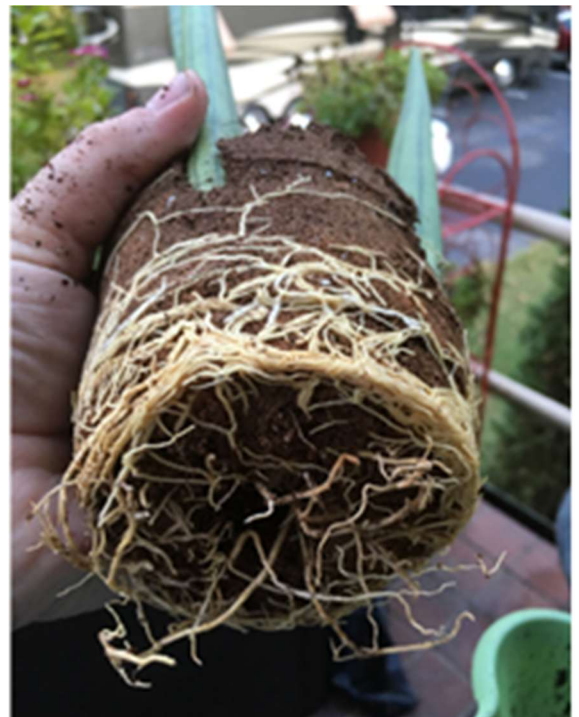
Use caution as you transition plants to outdoors. Placing plants directly in full

sun can lead to sun burnt plants. Transition them gradually into full sun (try keeping them shaded at first) over a week or two to allow them to acclimate to the changing environmental conditions.

It's a good time to examine your plants closely and assess your plants condition. Some may need pruning; others might need repotting. When repotting you want to move up in size to a pot no more than 2 inches greater in diameter. Small plants in a large pot are very likely to remain too wet and lead to root diseases.

Using fertilizers is a great way to ensure healthy robust plants. Keep in mind that too much of even a good thing like fertilizer is bad for plants. Many planting media mixes come with fertilizers included so be careful not to over fertilize plants. Follow the label directions on your favorite fertilizer and remember that some slower growing plants might prefer half strength fertilizer rates (half the amount).

Once outside it's not a bad idea to consider flushing the potted plant with water particularly if you notice a white or yellowish crust on the soil of your pot. Dissolved minerals exist in water and come from fertilizers as well. Over time these salts can build up to a level which can harm plants.



This African spear plant, *Sansevieria cylindrica*, was in need of repotting as evidenced by its rootbound condition.

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To flush the salts, use water with no fertilizer to water the plant until the volume flowing from the drain hole(s) is equal to at least 50% of the volume of the container. Don't allow the container to sit in the flushing water; if using a saucer or tray under plants be sure to empty it. This flushing can be done as needed and typically twice a year is sufficient. If the plant is outdoors and exposed to rain, a heavy rain can sometimes complete this task for you.

Choosing Fertilizers for Gardeners

What's the best Fertilizer?

The best answer is whatever product supplies the limiting/lacking nutrients in your garden. Granular and liquid products can each provide needed nutrients to our gardens. For the best fertilization results its important to fertilize not only at planting, but also through the season. Nitrogen is particularly best approached in this manner and for many gardens, that have been extensively fertilized in the past, nitrogen might be the only nutrient we apply. See the chart on page 3 of [Getting the Most out of your Home Vegetable Garden Soil Test Report](#) to learn to which vegetables and when to apply in season nitrogen fertilization.

Additionally, it's best to not only consider fertilizers, but also other ways to improve soil fertility and health. One of the best things to do for our soils is add organic matter. Organic matter is the organic compounds which result from the breakdown of organisms (plants, animals, microbiological, etc.) and their feces. It's great for our soils because it improves soil properties in several ways. Biologically organic matter feeds the microbiological community and provides nutrients to plants. Chemically it increases the cation exchange capacity of the soil which is to literally say that it increases the retention of positive charged nutrient ions (Ca, Mg, K, Zn). Physically it promotes the formation of aggregates in the soil which improves aeration and water infiltration.

We can add organic matter to soils in a number of ways. The use of organic mulches, green manures or cover crops (crops not harvested but used add organic matter), adding compost, or other organic based fertility amendments can all increase the soil organic matter content. We want to preserve soil organic matter content by reducing tillage or plowing of the soil. Reducing soil disturbance also preserves soil aggregates.

There are still excellent reasons to use fertilizer products in addition to building and preserving organic matter. Fertilizers are concentrated products that deliver specific nutrient to the garden. We can tailor our selection and application to match the specific nutrient quantity and timing our plants need.

Certified Organic Allowed Versus Conventional Fertilizers

I had a great question the other night from a class participant, and basically, they asked are certified organic allowed fertilizers better than conventional fertilizers. The best answer is basically they are very similar with slight differences. Part of this goes back to the earlier discussion on the fact that plants take up ions of nutrients. Once the nutrient is plant available it doesn't matter the source because a calcium ion is always a calcium ion.

Where certified organic allowed fertilizers might be better is the fact that many of them come with organic matter as part of the formulation. Remember organic matter being added to our soils is good. The bad of certified organic fertilizers is often the nutrients are not immediately available at application; there has to be

Do you have a gardening question? Do you need an insect identified? Give me a call, send an email, or text a picture.

Adam Watson: Office 423-753-1680, cell 423-430-6711, watson@utk.edu

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biological processes to make the nutrients plant available. This is especially a negative in cold soils as the processes are slowed by the lower soil temperatures. Conventional fertilizers get the leg up on rapid availability and typically a lower cost per unit of fertility.

We also have a somewhat easier time using conventional fertilizers if we want to add only specific nutrients. For instance, we can over apply phosphorous and potassium in gardens if we are using manure and composts as our primary nitrogen fertility source. Phosphorous over application is particularly bad because in fresh water ecosystems it is phosphorous pollution that is most damaging. There are limited options for high nitrogen organic products that also do not contain significant P and K.

The final word is to say that occasional soil testing along with judicious application of fertilizers (consider side-dressing during the season and not only a pre-plant application) and the use of organic matter amendments, will let us maintain soil fertility and our garden yields. If we take the next step of actively managing soil to promote their health and fertility, we can better steward available resources.

[Getting the Most out of your Home Vegetable Garden Soil Test Report; The Tennessee Vegetable Garden: Managing Plant Nutrition; The Tennessee Vegetable Garden: Stewardship in Soil Management](#)

Check out our [YouTube channel @ https://tiny.utk.edu/washingtonvideos](https://tiny.utk.edu/washingtonvideos) for videos of previous gardening webinars.

For questions about your home and garden please feel free to contact me, Adam Watson, Agriculture Extension Agent watson@utk.edu or Office (423) 753-1680.

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

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