



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA EXTENSION



NEWS & EVENTS

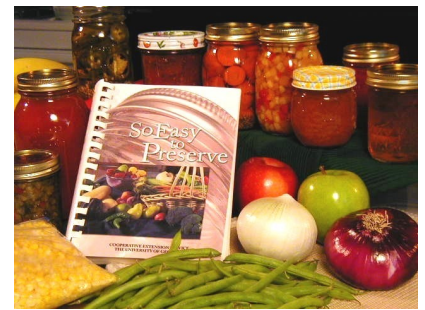
Cloverleaf DPA



Elbert County 4-H had an amazing day at Rock Eagle 4-H Center for Cloverleaf District Project Achievement. We are so proud of all of the students who competed! 97% of students placed in the contest. Elbert County won an award for having the Largest Increase in Participation.

So Easy to Preserve

Looking for a Christmas gift for the gardener or chef in your life? Elbert County Extension is pleased to have copies of the latest edition of a popular cookbook, *So Easy to Preserve*. Chapters in the 388-page book include Preserving Food, Canning, Pickled Products, Sweet Spreads and Syrups, Freezing and Drying. *So Easy to Preserve* cookbooks are \$25 each and make wonderful gifts, come by the office to purchase a gift that keeps giving!



December Garden Tips

Fruits and Nuts

- Plant fruit trees when available at nurseries.

Houseplants

- Give plants as much light as possible.
- Keep soil in poinsettias moist.
- Increase humidity around plants by grouping.

Flowers

- Start planning your flower garden now. Try new cultivars, add more color, change the color scheme, layer the colors by having taller and shorter plants - don't do it the same way year after year.

Ornamentals

- Plant shrubs and trees.
- Renew mulch around shrubbery.

Vegetables

- Plant asparagus in late December.
- Continue to harvest fall vegetables.
- Till garden soil after crops die down, remove debris from garden to prevent disease.
- Spread manure, rotted sawdust and leaves over the garden and plow them under; you'll be surprised at the difference this organic matter will make in the fertility, physical structure & water-holding capacity of the soil.
- You're wise to order seeds in December or January, while the supply is plentiful. Review the results of last year's garden and order the more successful varieties. Maybe you had too much of some vegetables and not enough of others—or maybe there were some unnecessary "skips" in supply (i.e. insects, diseases, nematodes). To keep from ordering too many seeds: draw a map of the garden, decide the direction & length of the rows, how much spacing is needed for each vegetable, whether or not to plant on raised beds
- You may have seeds left over from last year. Check their viability by placing some in damp paper towels and observing the germination percentage. If the percentage is low, order new ones.

AG & NATURAL RESOURCES

Selection and Care of a Christmas Tree **Brian Bradford , Elbert County ANR Agent**

As we are all working off the turkey and dressing of a Thanksgiving dinner, most of us are getting ready to put up our Christmas tree or have already done so. A symbol of life amidst the dark, cold winter, this time of year, millions of families will be decorating their homes with evergreen trees to celebrate the holiday season. The history of Christmas trees is an interesting story you might want to read more in-depth about, but we credit Germany with starting the tradition in the 16th century. Surprisingly, it didn't catch on in the US until the latter half of the 19th century. Most Christmas trees were initially harvested from the forest and sourced on the farm or homestead. While some families still harvest their trees, most Christmas trees are grown on farms. Over time, the Christmas tree market has evolved to include more choices, including artificial, pre-cut trees and those obtained from local pick-your-own farms. When it comes to cut tree options, there are several different tree species from which you may choose, with the best-selling species being Fraser fir, Noble fir, and Douglas fir. Balsam fir and Scotch pine are also popular choices. Fraser fir is the most common Christmas tree species in our region and throughout the United States. In fact, Fraser firs account for approximately 98% of the trees produced in North Carolina, the second leading producer of Christmas trees and the top producer of Fraser fir in the U.S. Thinking about getting a cut tree this year? There are several considerations you need to make before bringing one home.

- * First, have a good idea of where you will place the tree. Trees tend to look smaller when they're outside. That, coupled with the excitement of the moment, may lead to purchasing a larger tree than you need.
- * Second, remember that most tree toppers and stands can easily add over 6 inches to a tree, so extra height must be included when shopping for your tree. Also, look for a full canopy without empty pockets of branches.
- * Thirdly, once you've made your selection and you're bringing your tree home, it's important to understand that a tree that has been cut down is still alive. All of the normal physiological processes of that tree are still happening, which means it will need water! Keeping the tree hydrated is crucial to keeping it fresh looking through Christmas.

Another tip for live tree users would be to place the tree in the shade until you are ready to bring it in the house. Give the tree several good shakes to dislodge dried-up needles, insects, and dust. Once the tree is inside the home, check the water level in the tree stand often and try to keep it topped off. It will surprise you how fast the tree uses water. Place your tree away from space heaters, fireplaces, and wood stoves to prevent an accident. Electric lights and extension cords should be checked for safety and defects before use. Frayed wires, broken sockets, or loose connections can all be a fire hazard. Do not leave tree lights on while the tree is unattended. If you have small children or indoor pets, remember them when trimming the tree. With some planning and preparation, live Christmas trees can add a festive feel to your home during the holiday season.



From your Elbert County Extension Office, we hope that each and every one of you will have a wonderful Christmas and Holiday Season.

FAMILY & CONSUMER SCIENCES

Freezing Casseroles, Soups and Stews Christa Campbell, Elbert County FACS Agent

There is nothing like a hot bowl of homemade soup on a cold winter day. But who has time to make it? Schedules are busy during school days and holidays. Just imagine having a freezer full of delicious, homemade meals ready to be heated and served when you get home from work. Even better than that, picture yourself stress-free during the holidays because you prepared and froze your holiday meals and treats in advance. Freezing prepared foods in advance allows you the satisfaction of homemade meals with the convenience of store-bought ones.

There are just a few things to keep in mind when freezing prepared foods. Freezing will not improve the texture, flavor, or quality of food. It simply acts to preserve the quality of the food. Therefore, you should only freeze high quality products. After cooking the food, you plan to freeze, be sure it is cooled quickly to maintain the safety of the food. Be sure to package foods for the freezer in moisture-vapor resistant materials to prevent freezer burn. Clearly label each package with the name of the food, ingredients, packaging date, special instructions, and the amount of food. Package foods only in amounts that you will be able to use at one time. Freeze food as soon as it is packaged and sealed, and place in the coldest part of the freezer. Remember to research the ingredients ahead of time to see what foods do not freeze well, and to see if there are any special instructions for preparing and freezing your product

Several options are available for thawing prepared foods. The frozen food can be taken directly from the freezer and immediately placed in the oven for thawing and heating as long as it is in a freezer-to-oven safe container. Some foods can be thawed and heated using a double boiler. Foods that contain fish, meat, eggs or other high protein ingredients should be thawed in the refrigerator or microwave. To ensure the safety of your food, do not allow these potentially hazardous foods to stay in the temperature danger zone (40 degrees F - 140 degrees F) for more than 2 hours. Breads, cakes, and cookies that are precooked may be thawed at room temperature. Reheat all prepared foods except non-meat baked goods, sweets and fruits to at least 165 degrees F quickly, within 2 hours.

Planning ahead and freezing prepared foods is a great way to keep homemade food on your dinner table without all of the stress and hassle.

For more information:

Preserving Food: Freezing Prepared Foods, FDNS-E-43-14, The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service.
<https://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/uga/FreezingPreparedFoods.pdf>



4-H & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

“Earthies” Science Club

6TH GRADE ONLY. If you love earth science, then this activity is for you! Join us after school in the Clover Room as we expand on our knowledge of earth science in fun, engaging activities. We will meet again on **Wednesday, December 6th**. A ride must pick you up at 5:00pm at the ECMS auditorium and you must be a 6th grade student to attend.

Portfolio Workshop

All Junior and Senior 4-H'ers who want to attend Junior-Senior District Project Achievement with Elbert County 4-H in March must complete a portfolio. Ms. Lauren and Ms. Sophie can help you! A Portfolio Workshop will be held in the Clover Room (ECMS) on **Friday, December 15th from 1pm-5pm**. **You can also make an appointment for additional help**. Categories of the portfolio include: 4-H'er background, main project work, main project helping and sharing, teen leadership, community service and citizenship, 4-H activities and other/school events or information.

ELEVATE Afterschool Club

Spend your afternoon with us learning a variety of topics, completing projects, and enjoying fun activities! You are sure to love this engaging and interactive time in the 4-H Clover Room (ECMS auditorium lobby) and BEYOND! Meetings are held monthly afterschool until 5:00pm. The next meeting is **Thursday, December 14th**.

Young Riders Horse Club

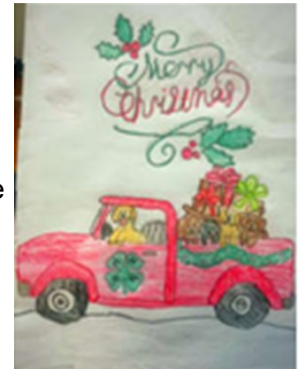
If you like horses, make plans to join the Young Riders Horse Club! This afterschool club will meet once a month to learn & have fun! You do NOT have to own or ride a horse to participate in this Club! Meetings are held in the Clover Room at the ECMS (auditorium lobby), after school until 5:00pm. Our next meeting is **Tuesday December 12th**.

Horse Quiz Bowl

Horse Quiz Bowl is a competitive event where students are charged with learning thousands of pages of horse related content, which they must then answer questions on in a jeopardy styled contest held in January! This is a wonderful way to enhance your knowledge if you are an avid horse lover—but it is not for those who do not want to learn!!! Although fun, there will be homework and tests along the way! Our next practice will be held **Wednesday, December 13th**, in the Clover Room from 3pm-5pm.

Happy Holidays!

We appreciate all the students who participated in the Georgia 4-H Holiday Card Contest. There were 71 total entries from Elbert County! Congratulations to our local winners! 1st Place Savannah Adriance, 2nd Place Zola Graves, 3rd Place Justin Wydick, 4th Place Emma Engelhardt, and 5th Place Saige Martin.



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Monday - Friday

8:00am - 5:00pm

Closed 12:00pm-1:00pm

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