Show Your Spring Colors!

The winter of 2010-2011 was one of the colder ones we have had in a few years. Most people can attest to that because of the high cost of heating their homes. The cold weather went back to early December as we had the coldest December on record. We had the ground covered with snow several times. My wife’s dog Maggie was introduced to snow for the first time and she loved going out and playing in it. She is a cold weather kind of dog. Winter landscapes often look drab to some because of the lack of color.

But, if you live in North Carolina you know that spring and all its glory will be coming around the corner. Around the time of the ACC tournament we can begin to see some signs of spring colors. Buttercups will be blooming and other bulbs tired of a winter’s worth of sleep begin to emerge looking for the time to show off their colors with lovely blooms. If you take notice, the fields that are used for cool season hay crops will begin to green up as will lawns and small grain fields. Farmers will be busy fertilizing the forages hoping to have a good hay crop and it is time to have their corn in the ground. One of the main things that all the pretty spring colors do is to improve most people’s attitude. After a long winter, the colorful show that nature is putting on seems to make everyone feel better and improve their attitude if only for a short time. A lot of people begin taking trips during this time and beautiful landscapes and time off will do wonders for people’s dispositions. On the downside of all of this are the bouts of severe weather that come with the changing seasons.

As you travel around the county and state be sure to take a look at the beauty of nature as spring time arrives. If you are in the neighborhood be sure to stop and look at the Arbor Gate garden beside the Agriculture Building. The flowers and plants will be bursting out with a very colorful display.
Spring Cleaning? Don’t Forget Your Kitchen and Your Diet!
~Jessica Oswald, MS, RD Family & Consumer Science Agent

Spring is on its way with longer days and warmer weather. The spring season brings about the ritual of spring cleaning; this year, when it comes time to spring clean, don’t leave out your diet or the kitchen!

Spring Clean Your Diet

A colorful new crop of fresh produce arrives with the Spring season and with this new produce comes the perfect opportunity to “spring clean” your diet. It’s time to get rid of the heavy foods that typically accompany winter and bring in the fresh fruits and veggies. Produce that is in-season provides the best nutritional value. So while you’re at your local farmer’s market or the produce aisle of your favorite grocery store, be sure to look for some of the following:

Strawberries
The peak season for these lovely red berries is April to June. A 1-cup serving of strawberries will provide you with 3.5 grams of fiber and 100% of your daily vitamin C needs.

Asparagus
Louis the XIV of France called asparagus the “food of kings.” It definitely has a regal nutritional profile. Asparagus is low in fat, high in fiber, and an excellent source of iron, B vitamins, and vitamin C. The peak months to purchase asparagus are March through June.

Broccoli
This vegetable is best when it has a vibrant dark green color. Broccoli is another vegetable that is a nutritional powerhouse; it’s high in iron and vitamins A and C. A 1-cup serving of chopped, cooked broccoli will provide 4.5 grams of fiber and is only 44 calories.

Apricots
Apricots are in season May to August. Eating these sweet little treats will give you a boost of beta-carotene, potassium, vitamin C, and fiber. Salsas, sandwiches, and salads are all a little bit sweeter with some added apricot.

Spring Clean Your Kitchen

The kitchen can be one of the dirtiest rooms in your house. When spring cleaning time rolls around, it would be beneficial to spend a few extra minutes getting your kitchen into tip-top shape. In fact, it would be beneficial to spend a few extra minutes in the kitchen each time you clean. Effective kitchen cleaning involves both cleaning and sanitizing.

Clean kitchen surfaces, pots, pans, and utensils. Don’t be afraid to really get after the dirt and dust. Germs do take up sanctuary in dirt and dust particles. Use warm water and soap. Rinse kitchen surfaces, pots, pans, and utensils. Use warm water to rinse away the soap, dirt, and dust; germs will wash away as well.

Sanitize the surfaces that you just rinsed. This will get rid of any leftover germs.

Wash your dishcloths and towels.

Wash your towels and dishcloths in the washing machine on a hot water cycle. Dry them using the dryer. Dishcloths and towels, especially when wet, provide a perfect environment for bacterial growth.

Give the refrigerator a good cleaning. Get rid of any spills, bacteria, yeast, and mold that are hiding out in your refrigerator. Once the refrigerator is clean, make sure that it is set at 32°-38°F to keep food safe.
Grow your colors
~Mark Danieley, Horticulture Agent

Spring is almost here and soon it will be time to plant the summer garden. If you are looking for something different, you might be surprised at the variety of vegetables we have to choose from. I have been browsing through my Parks Seed and Johnny’s Seed catalogs and have found some new and different varieties. Bored with green beans and red tomatoes? Would you like to grow green beans that are purple or yellow and tomatoes that are orange or green? I’m not sure about eating purple potatoes, but I’ll list some choices and let you decide what you want to try.

Let’s start with green beans. The main decision used to be whether to grow bush or pole type beans, but now we can choose color. If you want a yellow bean, look for a variety named Rocdor. It has an attractive golden yellow pod and should do well in our area. There is also a purple colored bean named Royal Burgundy. The purple pods will add color to your salad when used fresh, but will turn green when cooked.

Sweet peppers have an amazing range of colors. If you want a wide variety of colors in your garden, sweet peppers will do it for you. Most start off green and then change color as they mature. The colors available include red, orange, yellow, gold, brown, and maroon. If you want to try an assortment of colors, but don’t want to buy several seed packets, Parks has a Sweet Rainbow Blend that contains 7 varieties in one pack.

Tomatoes are another garden favorite that are available in many colors. Heirloom varieties have become more popular and many of them have distinctive colors. Cherokee Purple is one of the more popular heirlooms and the color is described as ‘dusky red’ to purple. I have grown Cherokee Purple in my garden, but I did have a little trouble knowing when it was ripe. That is one problem with some of the less traditional tomato colors. It takes a little practice to know when a green or purple tomato is ripe. There are also a number of very attractive yellow and orange tomato varieties.

Adding color to the garden does not have to be just a choice of flowers. I encourage you to try some new varieties of vegetables this year that are colorful as well as tasty.

http://www.parkseed.com/gardening/PD/5037/
http://www.parkseed.com/gardening/PD/40472/
http://www.parkseed.com/gardening/PD/5814/

In Living Color: Arbor Gate Garden
Come see what the Alamance County Master Gardeners have grown! Visitors are always welcome at the Teaching Garden, located at the Agriculture Building on Graham-Hopedale Road. Stop by any time, or call for a guided tour: 336.570.6740

http://www.parkseed.com/gardening/PD/5037/
http://www.parkseed.com/gardening/PD/40472/
http://www.parkseed.com/gardening/PD/5814/
How Now, Brown Cow?
~Jennifer King, Livestock Agent

Spring is the time of year when we all start admiring the beautiful colors of flowers blooming and grass growing. In addition to admiring the lovely landscape, take a little time to consider the interesting colors and patterns of animals around you.

Coat color in cattle is influenced by only a few genes but can create a variety of visual patterns. Black, white, and red are the three base colors for the common patterns of roan, whiteface, spotted, color sided, belted, and brindle.

Roan is usually recognized as a splotchy distribution of white and pigmented hair throughout the body. Belgian Blue and Shorthorn breeds typically present a roan pattern in their coat.

Herefords and Simmentals typically display this color pattern. Black Baldy cattle are Herefords crossed with a solid black breed, like Angus, and will produce whiteface cattle. These black baldies are growing in popularity among cattle producers because of their hybrid vigor, good mothering abilities, and small calves to reduce dystocia.

When most young children think of cows they picture a black and white spotted Holstein. The spotting pattern occurs in both beef and dairy breeds of cattle and can be a variety of colors.

Cattle which demonstrate a color sided pattern will often have a white stripe along their back and underside. A colored portion will extend down the middle length of the animal. Most Longhorns have the color sided pattern.

The belted pattern is quite the opposite of the color sided pattern. Belted cattle have a dark colored front and rear end with a white ‘belt’ wrapping vertically around their mid section. Breeds who demonstrate this coloration are the Dutch Belted and Belted Galloway.

A brindle appearance in cattle coat color is displayed in a well blended assortment of colors. This pattern has more of a marbled or streaked appearance than the roan pattern. Highlands, Longhorns, and some Jerseys have a brindle coat.

These are just a few of the most common patterns you might see in livestock as you’re driving through the countryside. Many of these colorations are found in multiple species with a plethora of variations. See if you can recognize any of these patterns the next time you’re around livestock.
**Spring Colors**  
~Roger Cobb, Field Crops Agent

Spring is the time many colors fill the landscape. Unfortunately not all of these are welcome colors. For those with ponds on their property now is the time some are beginning to show some green colors on the surface. This is usually not a good sign. Samples have already been brought to the Extension office of the dreaded pond weed-watermeal. This pond weed looks perfectly harmless at this point but will explode on the surface of ponds around the county as the spring turns into summer.

Why would I call watermeal the dreaded pondweed? It is dreaded because it is quite unsightly as it covers the pond surface more and more as the year progresses. It is dreaded because there is no cheap way to control this weed. The chemical control is very expensive often making people decide draining the pond to get rid of it. What adds insult to injury is that it falls to the bottom of the pond during the winter time giving some false hope that it is gone and will not reappear in the spring.

How does watermeal get into the pond? It is carried mechanically to the water by some animal, equipment or human. Why does my pond have watermeal and my neighbor’s does not? That is a question that I can’t answer. Why does it continue to reproduce during the year? Nutrients are getting into the pond and fuel the tiny weed’s growth just as fertilizer fuels growth of weeds in a lawn or field.

Another disturbing thing about watermeal is that it seems to appear in the ponds that are built to add scenic beauty to a lawn or landscape. I am often told it would not bother me so bad except the pond is in my front yard and I have to look at it every time I leave or return to the house. Isn’t that the way it seems to be? The pond on the back 40 where you have to make an effort to get there is clear and clean.

There are no comforting words for those whose pond has been invaded by watermeal. Most of the time we return to the question about why my pond has watermeal in it and my neighbor’s does not? Just another mystery of life. Those words are not comforting.

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**Watermeal Facts**

Watermeal, *Wolffia spp.*, is a very tiny (less than 1 millimeter) light green free-floating, rootless plant. In fact, watermeals are the smallest known flowering plants. Watermeal tends to grow in dense colonies in quiet water, undisturbed by wave action. Often watermeal is associated with colonies of duckweeds.

Dense colonies of watermeal often can completely cover the surface of a pond and will cause dissolved oxygen depletions and fish kills. These colonies will also eliminate submerged plants by blocking sunlight penetration. Watermeal is not known as an important food, but many ducks may consume it and often transport it to other bodies of water.
Green Clovers and Blue Ribbons
~Beth Davis, 4-H Agent

Almost everyone has seen the 4-H Clover whether they know what it means or not. It’s a green clover with a white H in each of the leaves. It has also been said that when people see the 4-H Clover, they tend to smile. Even if they have no idea what 4-H is, they still associate it with something positive. That’s what we try to do in 4-H, create positive experiences and fond memories. Many times that’s why parents and grandparents want their kids to become involved in 4-H. They have memories of going to 4-H camp, showing livestock, or doing activities in their clubs. If you’re wondering what the 4 Hs stand for, they are Head, Heart, Hands and Health, creating a holistic approach to youth development. The green in the 4-H Clover represents nature’s most abundant color and is symbolic of springtime, life, youth and growth. The white symbolizes purity and high ideals.

In 4-H, we have lots of competitions, and we like to give lots of Blue Ribbons. Sometimes though, you have to receive a red or white ribbon before you can achieve the blue. Even through losing, you learn. Sometimes that’s what drives us to do better the next time. When my sister was a teen 4-Her, she ran for a district office, which is a pretty significant leadership achievement. The first year she ran, she didn’t win. But she didn’t let that get her down. She learned from her experience, and ran again the next year. This time, she won. The year after that, she ran for State 4-H President and won. So, it’s okay if we don’t win the blue ribbon at first. What matters is that we learn from those experiences and persevere.

If you are interested in getting your child involved in 4-H, please contact Beth Davis, 4-H Agent at 336-570-6740 or beth_davis@ncsu.edu.

Color This Summer Fun!

Alamance County 4-H Summer Fun programs will begin in June this year and run through the first week of August. Planning is still underway, but registration dates are set. Registration for 4-Hers enrolled in a 4-H Club will be May 9-13. Registration for the public will be May 16-20. As in the past, registration will be by appointment only (30 minute appointments) and you can call to make an appointment as soon as the Summer Fun brochure is released, which should be mid-April. Keep an eye on our website for the brochure.

Hatching a Rainbow

One project that we are doing this spring with middle and elementary school classrooms is 4-H Embryology. Teachers that participate receive an incubator, curriculum and training, as well as a dozen eggs. This program is geared toward the science objectives for the Standard Course of Study and is a great hands-on tool that teachers can use to teach science. Eleven middle school classes participated early this spring and there are currently 53 elementary school classes signed up. Local farmers provide the 4-H program with the eggs. These classes get to see that chickens can come from different colored eggs and that not all chicks are yellow.

The 4-H Embryology program is offered to home school families in the fall.