New Year, New You!

The year 2011 came and went at a rapid pace. Even though every day has 24 hours in it some days seem like they only have 12 or 14. Last year we had to deal with some pretty nasty weather which included tornadoes, drought and many 95 plus degree days. We had a fair amount of snow in the winter but now it seems like that was so long ago. We don’t know what the winter of 2012 will bring. School kids always want it to snow so they can miss a day of school. I always wonder when they are sitting in school on Saturday if that missed day for snow was worth it. Maybe they don’t remember that snow day at all. I always hated to go to school on Saturday. School and Saturday just didn’t seem to go together for me.

With every January 1 comes new challenges and opportunities. If 2011 was your first attempt at gardening you will probably want to try some new things because of what you learned last year. New varieties come along almost every year and that offers the opportunity for improved disease resistance, better taste, better insect control and other benefits. Surely your friends or neighbors will want you to try the something they have done for years that always works. And if you tried gardening for the first time and deer found your garden, you will have to find new defenses against these four legged creatures.

If you have never tried canning or freezing that garden produce, this might be the year you learn about proper food preservation. You can provide your family with garden-grown vegetables year round this way. If gardening is not appealing to you, it may be the opportunity to buy local -grown food from some of the vegetable and fruit farmers in Alamance County. Going out to their farm to buy directly from the producers will give your family new opportunities to buy fresh local food and enjoy making new friends with our farmers. Whatever the new year brings, make sure you try some new things to enhance your life in Alamance County.

Roger N. Cobb, Director
New Year, New Diet Plan
~Jessica Oswald, MS, RD, LDN
Family & Consumer Science Agent

The holiday season has come to an end. A good time has been had by all. The New Year is here and it’s time for a fresh start; it’s time to make your New Year’s Resolutions. This year, make some resolutions to eat healthy. Here are a few to help you get started.

- Make a resolution to eat a good breakfast every day. Eating breakfast is a great addition to any resolution that involves weight loss or healthy eating. There are many benefits to eating breakfast. People who eat breakfast eat fewer calories throughout the day when compared to people who don’t eat breakfast. People who eat breakfast, on average, weigh less than people who do not eat breakfast; and people who eat breakfast are better able to concentrate on tasks compared to those who don’t eat breakfast.

- Make a resolution to have a fruit and/or vegetable with every meal and snack. Fruits and vegetables will add fiber, vitamins, and minerals to your diet. More often than not, people who are having trouble losing weight don’t eat enough fruits and vegetables. Fill up half your plate at dinner and lunch with fruits and/or vegetables. Have a fruit with breakfast. Have some fruit for a snack and if you need something sweet at the end of the day, have some strawberries sprinkled with a little Splenda or Truvia.

- Make a resolution to have a healthy eating pattern. This means that you need to eat every 3-4 hours when you’re awake. Keeping this type of eating pattern will keep your metabolism revved up throughout the day and will make sure that your body is using the food-fuel that you are giving it as efficiently as possible.

- Make a resolution to nix the calorie containing beverages. Sugar-sweetened beverages can add lots of unnecessary calories. Studies have indicated that our bodies may not really know what to do with these liquid calories and studies have shown that when we drink too many calories, we are more likely to be overweight than if we ate too many calories. Swapping sodas and other sugary beverages for water or calorie-free beverages can save you hundreds of calories per day.

- Make it a resolution to go whole grain. Whole grains are more nutritionally packed than refined, white grains. Whole grains have more fiber, more vitamins, and more minerals than refined grains. Typically, people who make at least half of their grains whole grains have a healthier weight than people who stick to eating white, refined grains.

If you have any questions about creating a healthy eating lifestyle, please feel free to contact me at (336) 570-6740 or Jessica_oswald@ncsu.edu
New Year, New Garden

~Mark Danieley, Horticulture Agent

If you have not tried to grow vegetables before, 2012 may be the year for you. Vegetable gardening is enjoyed by many people for many different reasons. For some it is a relaxing escape from the pressures of urban living. The joy and accomplishment from tending a garden is the motivation of others. More reasons include the reduction of the family’s food budget, a source of hard-to-find vegetables, superior taste, quality, and freshness. Knowing how the plants are grown (whether pesticides were used or not) is a concern of many people as well.

Selecting a garden site is very important to the success of your garden. Be careful not to start with too large a space. If you are over ambitious when starting your garden you may soon get overwhelmed with work and lose interest. The average size family garden should be only 640 square feet (20’ X 32’). If you are a first time gardener, a 200 square foot garden will provide plenty of produce without a tremendous time commitment. If you don’t have that much space, a couple of tomato plants can usually be squeezed in between the foundation shrubs as long as they will receive enough sunlight. Many vegetables can be successfully grown in containers on your patio or deck.

There are several other factors to consider when planning your vegetable garden. The most important factor is the amount of sunlight your garden spot receives. Six hours of direct sunlight is necessary and eight to ten is better. Some vegetables tolerate shade better than others. Broccoli, collards, kale, parsley, and lettuce are more tolerant of shade than root and fruit crops like potatoes and tomatoes.

Select the vegetables you want to grow and draw a diagram of the garden site. This plan will ensure you have a good variety of produce without too much of any one vegetable. Keep this plan for the future so you can avoid planting related vegetables in the same location more than once in three years. This crop rotation helps prevent the buildup of insects and disease problems, which will reduce the need for pesticides.

The ideal garden soil is a good loamy soil that is fertile, deep, easily crumbled, well drained, and high in organic matter. Unfortunately most of us don’t have that kind of soil. Heavy clay soil can be productive with the addition of some type of organic matter. A 3-4 inch layer of well rotted leaves, compost, or old manure tilled into the clay soil will improve the drainage and aeration of the soil.

The general recommendation is to take a soil test every three years, but I prefer to take a soil sample every year. Once the pH has been corrected you should not need to apply lime every year, but you will probably need to apply some nitrogen. It is important however to not apply too much nitrogen as that will cause poor fruiting in vegetables like tomatoes and squash. The soil test will give specific recommendations for the proper amount of fertilizer to apply. The pH for most vegetables is 6.0 to 6.5 and it is best to apply lime several months before planting if possible and till the lime into the soil.

For more information on vegetable varieties, planting dates, and other cultural information please call the Alamance County Cooperative Extension office at (336) 570-6740.
New Year, New Bull?
~Jennifer King, Livestock Agent

After you’re finished decking your halls with boughs of holly and ringing in the New Year, it may be time to buy a bull to “spruce” up your cow herd. It’s a new year, and one of the best ways to improve the genetics of your herd is to bring in a new bull. Here are some tips to consider when selecting a new bull for your cattle operation:

Look at your herd and establish long-term goals. Evaluate strengths and weaknesses of what you currently have and look for a bull to improve your stock.

Find a reputable source to purchase from. You are investing in genetics and health that will have an effect on your herd and profit for years to come.

Know the differences in age vs. price tag. A yearling bull may have a low initial cost, but will require more management and input for it to grow. Two year old bulls are usually more expensive initially, but can service more cows and heifers and require less management in the long run.

Looks matter! Pick a bull with enough stature to get your calves in medium grade with good muscling and length. Check feet and legs for structural soundness.

Expected Progeny Difference, or EPD’s, are a set of numbers that will compare how one bull’s genetics matches up to others of the same breed. These numbers will determine a specific bull’s genetic value on traits like birth weight, weaning weight, frame size, and calving ease.

Select a bull that has either had a breeding soundness exam or is reproducitively sound from external appearance. A Breeding Soundness Exam (BSE) is performed by a licensed veterinarian and will determine the capability of a bull for breeding purposes. A standard BSE will consist of a physical examination, examination of reproductive organs, and evaluation of semen. A bull must pass a normal physical and reproductive exam; have greater than 30% sperm motility, and greater than 70% sperm morphology. A ‘satisfactory’ rating means that the bull has passed all three criteria and is able to service your herd. If the veterinarian was not able to pass the bull on all three guidelines but feels that the bull’s condition may improve, he will give a ’deferred’ rating and suggest that the bull be re-evaluated within 60-80 days to allow enough time for new sperm to be created. An ‘unsatisfactory’ bull did not pass the breeding soundness exam and is not suitable for breeding.

The following chart from The University of Florida Extension Service shows the relationship of bull age to service capacity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bull Age</th>
<th>Bull to Cow Ratio</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12- 18 months</td>
<td>1: 15-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>1: 30-35</td>
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<tr>
<td>3- Aged (7 plus years)</td>
<td>1: 35-40</td>
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New Year, Lessons Learned

~Roger Cobb, Field Crops Agent

With a new year comes the hope for a successful crop year. In 2011 Alamance County had the best small grain crop we have ever had. High yields and high prices made our small grain crops real winners. Maybe that should have been a sign that everything else was not going to work out that great. Later on in the late spring and summer the rains became less frequent and with the less frequent rains came the high temperatures. Except for small areas in the county, that got some timely rains, the corn crop was below average in yield and quality. Corn prices were good at the beginning of harvest and fell off. With below average yields this did not make for a very profitable crop. Soybeans overall were even worse than the corn. Once again small pockets got some rain that helped out with the yields but overall below average. Tobacco suffered as well, but this crop did come on later as some timely rains fell. The drawback here was the late rains made a late crop. The late crop meant some tobacco was still out in the field with the first killing frost. The killing frost did what it always does-kill the remaining leaves rendering them useless.

What did we learn from 2011? We learned lessons we have been taught in the past. We can select the best varieties, plant at the proper time, control diseases and insects, but if the rain doesn’t fall at the right time and the temperatures get too high for too long then we will have less than desirable yields and quality.

However, people who plant seeds and transplants are eternal optimists. Next year will be a good one. That means good yields with good prices. A new year means new hopes of being successful in paying the bills and making money on the farm. You will see a smile on the face of people who farm for a living when the growing season is a good one and the harvest is plentiful. It means a season of hard work has paid off in not only profits, but the satisfaction of watching a crop grow to completion.

Pathway To Arbor Gate

Arbor Gate Teaching Garden has become central to many of the demonstrations and classes presented by Cooperative Extension staff. The hundreds of plants the Garden contains are clearly labeled, making a self-guided tour useful and informative for visitors who are able to see what a mature version of the plants available at the garden centers look like in the landscape.

Arbor Gate is maintained by Alamance County Master Gardeners, all of whom are volunteers. In addition to their work in the gardens, Master Gardener Volunteers provide educational programs throughout the year for area adults and school children. Master Gardeners staff a horticultural information hotline, answer questions at clinics, festivals and other community events, and assist with gardening workshops and demonstrations.

Although powered by volunteers, neither our educational activities nor the care and development of Arbor Gate is without cost. To help raise the funds we need, the Alamance Master Gardeners established the Friends of Arbor Gate Enhancement Fund. The Fund is housed within a tax exempt organization affiliated with NC State University. Your gift to the Fund will be completely tax deductible.

To learn more about the Friends of Arbor Gate Enhancement Fund, and how you can become a part of The Pathway To Arbor Gate Commemorative Brick Program, contact Chris Stecker, Master Gardener Program Coordinator, at 336-570-6740, or e-mail christine.stecker@alamance-nc.com.
New Year, New YOUth
~Beth Davis, 4-H Agent

Like many people this time of year, you are probably looking under the couch cushions trying to find spare change to compensate for overspending from the holidays. You’re probably tired of your kids sitting around the house saying, “I’m bored.” If you think there’s nothing affordable out there for your children to participate in, you’re wrong! Two words—Join 4-H. Not only will 4-H keep your children occupied, but it’s FREE to join and it’s educational AND fun.

If you aren’t that familiar with 4-H, you may be under the impression that it’s only for kids in the country that live on a farm. Wrong again! 4-H is for ALL youth, boys AND girls, ages 5-19, rural AND urban. 4-H is present in every county in North Carolina and every state in the US. There are even 4-H programs in other countries all around the world!

Maybe you’re tired of doing the same old thing with your kids and are looking for something new. Let’s say your teenager is interested in social media (as most teens are). They can actually use that to their advantage in 4-H. They could learn about the various aspects of social media, such as how many people you can reach, safety and security, social media etiquette and more. They could run for reporter of their 4-H club and create a club face-book page to keep members and parents updated. On twitter they could remind people about upcoming fund-raisers or events. They could even create a picture slide show at the end of the year. The sky is the limit in 4-H!

Think about the talents that your child possesses. How can you cultivate those talents so that he/she can use them to be successful in life? That’s what we do in 4-H. You don’t just learn about a subject, but the subject becomes a way of teaching young people life skills.

So put those couch cushions back in place and give us a call (570-6740) or check out our website: http://alamance.ces.ncsu.edu. You can see what clubs are available to join, or you can branch out and start a club of your own. Starting a new club is simple. All you have to do is:

- Fill out a 4-H Leader Application, turn it in (we will do a background check).
- Once you hear back, set up a meeting with Beth to discuss the details of starting the club.
- Find the following:
  1) At least 1 or 2 caring adults to help lead the club
  2) At least 5 kids, ages 5-19 to be members
  3) A safe place to meet (your home, a church, a community building, a library, etc.)
- If you know of several families that you can start a club with, you can discuss times and days that you want to meet and that will help you get started.

SOLUTIONS

Newsletter of the Alamance County Cooperative Extension Service