



December is busy with all of our Holiday classes, and January officially kicks off meeting season, especially for those vegetable producers. Wishing you and your family a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Happy Gardening!

Jessica Bessin

Jessica Bessin,
Mercer County Extension Agent for Horticulture



From Tree Thief To Holiday Tradition

Once autumn leaves have fallen, mistletoe becomes highly visible on large trees throughout Kentucky. *Phoradendron*, the scientific name for Kentucky's most common type of this parasitic plant, means tree thief. These small leafy plants are commonly found on twigs and branches of many hardwood species in the southern US. Mistletoe extracts (steals) water, mineral elements, and food from tree hosts; hence the name.



Mistletoe use in holiday decor has roots in pagan traditions. The appearance of a live parasitic plant while the host tree appears dead led some to believe that mistletoe mysteriously held the life of the tree during winter. Druids harvested mistletoe in a special rite, never allowing the plant to touch the ground, and then hung it in their homes for good luck.

Our modern-day mistletoe holiday tradition likely originates from a mythological Norse goddess of love and beauty. Frigga, whose son was restored from possible death by mistletoe, was thought to bestow a kiss on anyone walking beneath one. Today, when two people meet under the mistletoe, tradition suggests they must exchange a kiss for good luck.

Phoradendron has simple, fleshy green leaves arranged oppositely on stems. Stems are short and more branched than host trees, so mistletoe often appears as a spherical bunch of dense vegetation. These bunches may be a foot or two in diameter and are located high in the tree where sun exposure is greatest. Mistletoe berries range from white to straw-colored to light red. Birds eat the fruits, reportedly toxic to human and animals, then deposit the seeds onto branches where they germinate and penetrate the next host tree. Mistletoe commonly appears in open-grown trees where birds tend to roost, thereby less frequently in forest trees. Generally, mistletoe causes minimal damage, although it can be harmful to stressed trees. Mistletoe can be removed from landscape trees by pruning. Written By: Nicole Gauthier, Extension Specialist for Plant Pathology.



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Public Notification of Procedure for Filing a Complaint:

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To initiate a complaint at the college level, contact Tim West in the Business Office at 859-257-3879. At the University level, Terry Allen and Patty Bender in the [UK Office of Institutional Equity and Equal Opportunity](#) (859-257-8927) may be contacted. Additionally, employee or clientele complaints involving any research or extension sponsored program or activity may be directed to the USDA, Director Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W Whitten Bldg., 14th & Independence Ave. SW, Washington DC 20250-9410 (202-720-5964).

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Disabilities accommodated with prior notification

Spinach Pasta Bake

2 cups whole wheat penne pasta
 1 pound lean ground beef
 1 large onion, chopped
 1 large carrot, shredded
 1 teaspoon black pepper

1½ teaspoons dry basil
 1 teaspoon garlic powder
 1 teaspoon dried oregano

1 can (14 ounces) Italian diced tomatoes, drained
 10 ounces fresh spinach, chopped
 1 cup low-fat shredded Mozzarella cheese

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Cook pasta according to package directions. Drain and cover to keep warm. In a large skillet over medium heat, cook the beef and onions until beef is no longer pink. Drain. Return beef to skillet. Add carrots and spices and cook an additional two minutes. Stir in tomatoes. Reduce heat to low. Cover and simmer 10 minutes. Add pasta and spinach and mix well. Cover and cook an additional 3 minutes or until spinach is wilted. Pour into greased 3-quart baking dish. Sprinkle with Mozzarella cheese. Bake, uncovered for 10 minutes. Yield: 9, 1 cup servings

Nutritional Analysis: 200 calories, 4.5 g fat, 2 g saturated fat, 35 mg cholesterol, 270 mg sodium, 25 g carbohydrate, 4 g fiber, 4 g sugars, 18 g protein.



Buying Kentucky Proud is easy. Look for the label at your grocery store, farmers' market, or roadside stand. <http://plateitup.ca.uky.edu>

Zippy Corn Chowder

1 medium onion, chopped
 1 green pepper, chopped
 1 tablespoon butter
 1 (14.5 ounce) can low-sodium chicken broth
 2 large red potatoes, cubed
 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded

and chopped
 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
 1 teaspoon basil
 ½ teaspoon paprika
 ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes

3 cups fresh or frozen whole kernel corn
 4 green onions, chopped
 2 cups skim milk, divided
 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
 1 teaspoon salt (optional)

In a large saucepan, sauté onion and green pepper in butter until tender. Add broth and cubed potatoes. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat; cover and simmer for 15 minutes or until potatoes are almost tender. Stir in jalapeno, mustard, basil, paprika and red pepper flakes. Add corn, green onions and 1½ cups of milk. Bring to a boil. In a separate bowl, combine all-purpose flour and remaining ½ cup milk, stirring until smooth. Gradually add mixture to soup. Bring to a boil. Cook and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened and bubbly. Yield: 8, 1 cup servings

Nutritional Analysis: 190 calories, 2.5 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 5 mg cholesterol, 350 mg sodium, 34 g carbohydrate, 4 g fiber, 10 g sugar, 7 g protein



Buying Kentucky Proud is easy. Look for the label at your grocery store, farmers' market, or roadside stand.

Christmas Tree Recycling Program

My family enjoys a live Christmas tree each year, and once the holidays are over, and the needles start to fall we are left with the task of what to do with it. Many trees end up in our landfills, some are turned into mulch, and others can be used for fish habitats in some of our most popular lakes around the state. Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources (KDFWR) has drop-off points across the state where you can bring your old tree and put it to good use. KDFWR will take your tree and combine it with others to create fish attractors for lakes all over the state. Trees will be used to replenish existing fish habitat sites as well as create new habitat sites. These brush reefs provide nesting and rearing habitat for gamefish, as well as creating homes for invertebrates and smaller fishes that provide food for larger fish. Just clean your tree of all the artificial decorations, lights, tinsel, ornaments, etc., and drop it off at one of their many locations. Please visit the KDFWR website at: <https://tinyurl.com/3e3tx3jn> for their 2025 drop off locations, dates, and times.



Growing Microgreens

January 16
 10:00am

Is winter getting you down? Longing for warmer days? Why not garden now with microgreens. First 20 to register gets their own microgreen kit.



Call 859-734-4378 to
 RSVP



OAK's 14th Annual Organic Farming Conference

January 23-25, 2025

REGISTER NOW for OAK's 14th Annual Organic Farming Conference, *Grounded in Organics: From Soil to Market*, January 23-25, 2025, at Kentucky State University's Harold R. Benson Research and Demonstration Farm in Frankfort, Kentucky.

OAK's annual conference, now in its 14th year, includes a growing audience of hundreds of Kentuckians and neighbors active in the region's food systems: farmers, researchers, nonprofit professionals, federal and state agency partners, technical service providers and conscious consumers working collectively to build a resilient local food system for all. Collaboration among these diverse voices, grounded in the connection to Kentucky farms, soil and communities, provides a rich foundation for learning and growth.

www.oak-ky.org/annual-conference

2025 Area Produce Growers Meeting

Wednesday
 January 15
 2025

A full day with updates provided by UK Extension Specialist and other commercial producers.



Lincoln County Produce Auction
 2896 KY Highway 39 North
 Crab Orchard, KY 40419

Mark Those Calendars!!

Holiday Day of Fun!-December 12th, Mercer County Extension Office

Harrodsburg Tree Board Meeting- December 16th, Mercer County Extension Office 5:00 PM

Mercer County Extension Holiday Open House-Mercer Co. Extension Office, December 17th 4:00 PM-6:30 PM

See insert for more details.

Fort Harrod Beekeeping Club-No December meeting. Meetings will resume in January

See insert for more details. Make sure to check out the Fort Harrod Beekeeping Facebook page for all the latest updates and announcements!

Kentucky Fruit and Vegetable Conference- January 6th-7th, Marriot Lexington Griffin Gate

Area Produce Meeting-January 15th, Lincoln County Produce Auction

Growing Microgreens-January 16th, Mercer County Extension Office 10:00 AM

See flyer for more information.

Organic Association Of KY (OAK) Annual Meeting-January 23rd-25th, KSU Research Farm



The Mercer County Extension Office will be closed

December 25th, 2024 through January 1st, 2025 for the holiday season!



Mercer County Extension Council invites you to our

BIG BLUE OPEN HOUSE

December 17
4:00—6:30pm



See how Extension can be a benefit for you and your family! Meet your county agents and learn more about the programs we have to offer. We

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will have appetizers, refreshments, holiday crafts, and door prizes. Family-friendly event, all ages welcome.

Freebies include: calendars, jar openers, pizza cutters, and more.

Take your picture with Santa!

Mercer County Extension Office
1007 Lexington Road—Harrodsburg, KY 40330

Kentucky Fruit and Vegetable Conference

January 6-7, 2025

The 2025 Kentucky Fruit and Vegetable Conference will be Monday and Tuesday January 6-7, 2025 with pre-conference events on Sunday, Jan. 5 at the Marriott Lexington Griffin Gate Golf Resort & Spa in Lexington, KY.

This premier, state-wide event annually brings together approximately 600 growers, researchers, and technical support providers. The conference is devoted to fruit, vegetable, and cut flower production, handling, harvesting, marketing, storage, and related topics. The conference kicks-off with pre-conference events including fruit and vegetable grower roundtable discussions with university specialists where the group debriefs on the production year, challenges are discussed and questions are answered.

The main conference program has more than 20 different educational tracks with more than 70 speakers. The trade show offers more than 60 vendors featuring horticulture products and services.

Register here: tinyurl.com/2025fruitandveg

Kentucky State Horticultural Society 169th Annual Meeting
Kentucky Vegetable Growers Association 54nd Annual Meeting
Organic Association of Kentucky and Kentucky Horticulture Council

In cooperation with
University of Kentucky Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment

Kentucky State University College of Agriculture, Communities and the Environment and Kentucky Department of Agriculture



