

# Horticulture Newsletter



University of Kentucky  
College of Agriculture,  
Food and Environment  
Cooperative Extension Service

## Cooperative Extension Service

McCracken County  
2025 New Holt Road  
Paducah, KY 42001  
(270) 554-9520  
Fax: (270) 554-8283

Mary Hank

Agent for Horticulture



## DECEMBER 2022

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## Winter In the Garden

By: Mary Hank

Agent for Horticulture



Did you know you can enjoy your garden in December? Here are some helpful tips on how you can spend time in your garden during the winter months.

- Take pictures of your plants in the snow or when wildlife comes for a visit
- Gather leaves for mulch
- Empty your pots to prevent cracking and damage
- Cut your perennials back after the ground has frozen for winter (3 inches above the soil and add a thick layer of mulch)
- Remove weeds from your garden when they appear
- Tidy up your greenhouse
- Fill your bird and squirrel feeders
- Prune fruit trees, bushes, shrubs, and roses



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## Make Winter Green-thumb Friendly with an Indoor Garden

Source: Rick Durham, UK Extension Horticulture Professor

Gardening is often thought of as a spring and summer pastime, but you don't have to give up your gardening hobby just because winter is approaching. Continue working your green thumb this winter with an indoor container garden.

Container gardening refers to planting in containers rather than a traditionally tilled plot of land. Container gardening is a great way to bring your plants in from the cold and utilize small spaces such as windowsills and tabletops.

While the variety of crops you can plant in container gardens isn't as vast as traditional gardens, there are still a variety of planting options. Here are some easy plants to grow indoors this winter:

- **Scallions:** For scallions, also known as green onions, you can cut off the tip with the roots and place it in a glass with about an inch of water. When the roots are 2-3 inches long, plant them in potting soil in a shallow container. You can either harvest the green tops and let the plant continue to grow or use the entire green onion.
- **Garlic greens:** Plant a garlic clove in a few inches of potting soil mix for garlic greens. You won't be able to grow bulbs, but the green portion tastes garlicky and serves as a good substitute, either raw or sauteed.
- **Microgreens:** Microgreens refer to small edible greens grown from the seeds of vegetables and herbs such as broccoli and beets. Make sure the seeds you use are labeled for use as microgreens so there is no coating that may contaminate the plant. Sow the seeds thickly in new, clean potting soil in shallow containers like disposable aluminum pans with one to two inches of potting soil. Microgreens typically mature after 12-14 days or closer to 21 days for larger seeds and reach an average height of 4-5 inches tall. These can be used in salads, wraps or garnishes once fully grown.
- **Carrots:** Small carrots are easy to grow in potting soil. Sprinkle the seeds on top of the soil in a pot or long window box, lightly cover with damp peat moss and water well. And don't throw away those carrot tops. They're edible and nutritious and can be used in soups and sauces and even smoothies.
- **Herbs:** Basil, chives and parsley are extremely easy to grow indoors. Parsley demands more humidity, so misting the plants will help them flourish. Use organic fertilizer to help your herbs reach their full potential. One of the biggest challenges with indoor gardening is the lighting limitations. While you should utilize as much natural light from windows as possible, some plants may need additional light from grow lights. Grow lights come in all price ranges and styles, from full-spectrum fluorescent lights to LED plant lights that are a bit more expensive but use less electricity than fluorescent lights. Incandescent bulbs do not emit the right spectrum of light for plant growth.

Another issue you may come across is ensuring your containers have proper drainage. You should use potting soil, which has better drainage, rather than garden soil. Be sure your containers have a hole for drainage and are placed atop a detachable saucer or in a tray to catch extra water. After the water has drained into this catching device, empty excess water to lower the risk of root rot.

Even though you are using clean, presumably "sterile" potting soil, you should wash any plant parts thoroughly before consuming, especially if you are using them raw.

For more information about indoor gardening, contact the McCracken County office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

# American Mistletoe – A Holiday Plant Enjoyed by Pollinators and Wildlife

It's hard to miss the basketball-sized clusters of green leaves decorating the bare upper branches of trees as they reach up to the winter sky. Those basketball-sized clusters of leaves are most often mistletoes. There are several different species of mistletoe in North America, and even more in other parts of the world. Some prefer conifers. Others prefer deciduous hardwoods. Probably the most common species that prefer hardwoods in the eastern half of the U.S. is the American mistletoe, also known as the oak mistletoe (*Phoradendron leucarpum*). This is the species I'm most familiar with and that decorates the trees on our farm and in the surrounding region.

## General Biology and Life History

American mistletoe is an evergreen, hemi-parasitic, woody shrub. Hemi-parasitic just means that it is partially parasitic. Photosynthesis and the production of sugars that the plant uses for food occurs in American mistletoe's evergreen leaves in the same way that the process occurs in the leaves of most non-parasitic plants. However, unlike most non-parasitic plants, American mistletoe does not draw its water and mineral requirements from the soil. Instead, it gets its water and minerals from the tree on which it is growing. Thus, the parasitic part of its nature.



Photo by Dids on Pexels.com

Although another one of its common names is oak mistletoe, American mistletoe doesn't just grow on oaks. It can be found growing on the branches of many different types of hardwood trees including oaks, maples, ashes, walnuts, and many more. American mistletoe typically blooms in the fall and early winter, or approximately October through December in Kentucky. Mistletoe has male and female plants which means that some plants only have female flowers and some plants only have male flowers.

Fertilized female flowers will produce a white berry with a very sticky seed and pulp. Birds eating the berry will often swipe their beaks along a branch to try to wipe the stickiness off their bills. In the process of wiping their bills, they'll often wipe the mistletoe seed into a crack in the bark. The seeds may also stick to the bird's feathers or feet and be moved in that manner from one tree to the next. Not to mention, what goes in, must come out and

mistletoe seeds that are eaten by birds tend to come out relatively quickly, often being deposited on a different branch or in a different tree from the original plant.

When a mistletoe seed lands on a tree branch, it germinates and sends out shoots that penetrate the tree's bark. Those shoots produce a chemical that tricks the tree into thinking that the mistletoe is a tree branch. The tree sends water and minerals to the mistletoe just like it would any other branch. Some sources say that mistletoes can also cause the tree to send extra water and minerals to it, even at the expense of the rest of the tree. Whether that is true of all mistletoes or only certain species is unclear.

## Pollinator and Wildlife Uses

Many different types of insects, including wasps, bees, and ants, frequently visit American mistletoe flowers. Bees of all types, including honey bees and native bees, will collect nectar and pollen from mistletoe flowers. The ripe berries are quickly eaten by a wide variety of birds in the late fall and winter. American mistletoe is also the only thing that the caterpillar of the great purple hairstreak butterfly (*Atlides halesus*) will eat. In addition to the variety of food sources mistletoe provides, its dense, shrubby growth pattern also provides cover and protection for nesting birds and treetop dwelling mammals.

## Human Uses of Mistletoe

Different species of mistletoes have been used over the centuries for religious purposes and for medicinal purposes. However, mistletoes are also poisonous to humans with some species being more poisonous than others. Most sources say that American mistletoe is less poisonous than its European cousin, but why chance it? Just, don't eat the mistletoe. Any mistletoe.

The use for mistletoe that most of us are probably more familiar with is as a holiday decoration to inspire kissing. The kissing custom is thought to date back possibly to the 16th century in Europe and was brought over to North America relatively early in the colonial days. The American mistletoe is one of at least three species that is sometimes called the Christmas mistletoe because of its use for holiday decorations.



Photo by Mariah Chamberlain on Pexels.com

## Incorporating American Mistletoe into Your Yard

American mistletoe isn't a plant that you are going to "plant" in your yard. It is either going to show up on its own, or it isn't. Some resources say that trees serving as hosts for mistletoes have a significantly shortened lifespan. Others say that any damage mistletoes do is dependent on a number of factors, such as the health of the tree and how much mistletoe it is supporting. The species of mistletoe also seems to be one of the determining factors for whether its presence significantly shortens the tree's life.

Some of the mistletoe species that prefer conifers have been scientifically shown to shorten the tree's life. Although that may sound like a bad thing, it is a natural part of the ecosystem and creates a habitat for a wide variety of animals. On the other hand, scientific evidence is much less clear as to whether American mistletoe, which prefers hardwoods, shortens its host tree's life. Maybe if there was a lot of American mistletoe in a tree, then it might have a negative effect on the tree, but usually, a few clumps on a healthy tree don't seem to do much.

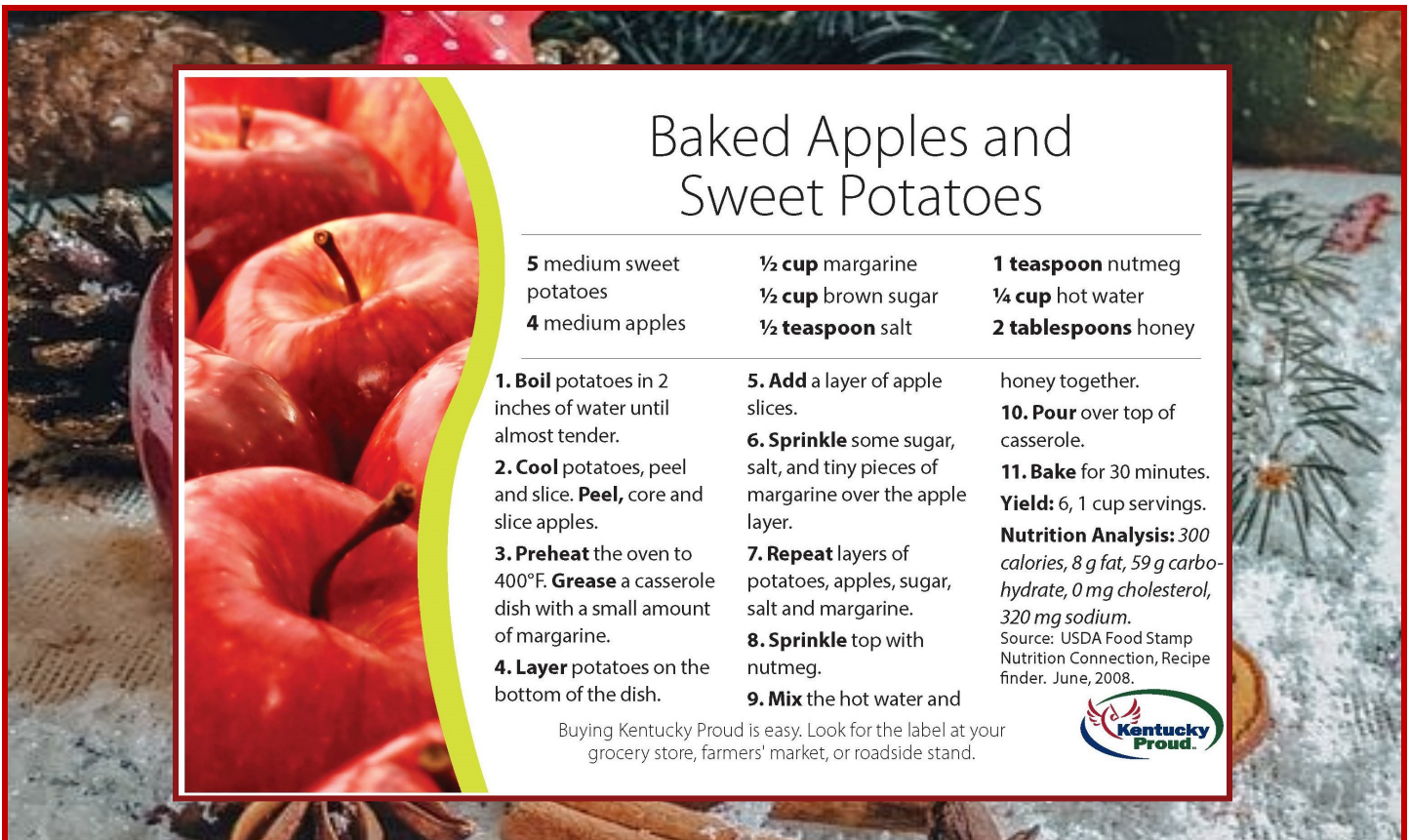
We have quite a few clumps of mistletoes growing in the trees on our property. I like looking out and seeing them, especially in the winter when the rest of the tree is bare. I also know that they provide important resources for my birds and pollinators, so I don't worry about them. The trees with mistletoe growing on them look the same as neighboring mistletoe-free trees, so I assume everything is good. Plus, the American mistletoe shrubs are WAY up in the tops of the trees where it would be hard to do anything about them anyway.

If you are concerned about a clump of mistletoe in your trees, then you will need to find where the main trunk of the mistletoe enters the tree branch. Then cut the branch at least a foot back towards the tree trunk from where the mistletoe trunk enters the tree branch. However, there is no way to stop birds from depositing new mistletoe seeds on your tree branches. My advice is to just let it be unless there is a pressing need to do otherwise.

### Summary

American mistletoe is an interesting, native plant with a fascinating life history. It is a valuable part of our ecosystem and provides shelter for nesting birds and tree-dwelling mammals. In addition, it is a valuable food source for many of our pollinators, songbirds, and the caterpillar of the great purple hairstreak. American mistletoe also plays a role in our holiday traditions. Although it isn't a species that we might plant in our yards, it is still a fun one to enjoy when it shows up.

Guest Post – Shannon Trimboli, <https://www.backyardecology.net/>




### Baked Apples and Sweet Potatoes

<b>5</b> medium sweet potatoes	<b>½ cup</b> margarine	<b>1 teaspoon</b> nutmeg
<b>4</b> medium apples	<b>½ cup</b> brown sugar	<b>¼ cup</b> hot water
	<b>½ teaspoon</b> salt	<b>2 tablespoons</b> honey

- 1. Boil** potatoes in 2 inches of water until almost tender.
- 2. Cool** potatoes, peel and slice. **Peel**, core and slice apples.
- 3. Preheat** the oven to 400°F. **Grease** a casserole dish with a small amount of margarine.
- 4. Layer** potatoes on the bottom of the dish.
- 5. Add** a layer of apple slices.
- 6. Sprinkle** some sugar, salt, and tiny pieces of margarine over the apple layer.
- 7. Repeat** layers of potatoes, apples, sugar, salt and margarine.
- 8. Sprinkle** top with nutmeg.
- 9. Mix** the hot water and honey together.
- 10. Pour** over top of casserole.
- 11. Bake** for 30 minutes.

**Yield:** 6, 1 cup servings.  
**Nutrition Analysis:** 300 calories, 8 g fat, 59 g carbohydrate, 0 mg cholesterol, 320 mg sodium.  
Source: USDA Food Stamp Nutrition Connection, Recipe finder. June, 2008.

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





## The McCracken County Homemaker's

community boxes need our attention this holiday season.

We have a box for non-perishable food items

&

a box for personal hygiene items.

We are so thankful our community is so giving to others.

Bless you all!

## The annual Kentucky Fruit and Vegetable Conference

is the premier educational program for produce growers  
and value-added producers in KY

### Location

Sloan Convention  
Center

1021 Wilkinson Trace

Bowling Green, KY  
42103

### Registration link

<https://bit.ly/3G2kcv>

Or

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2023-kentucky-fruit-vegetable-conference-tickets-432313791187>



# 2023 TOOLBOX GARDEN SERIES



College of Agriculture,  
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**McCracken County Extension Service**

2025 New Holt Road Paducah, KY 42001

(270) 554-9520

**January 3rd** : Winter Sowing

**February 7th** : Propagation by Seed

**March 7th** : Monarch Waystation

**April 4th** : Fairy Garden *\*RSVP Required. Limit 20\**

**May 2nd** : Entomology

**June 6th** : Floral Arrangements

**July 4th** : No Toolbox this month

**Aug 1st** : Sprouts and Mushrooms

**September 5th** : Orchids

**October 3rd** : Propagation by Cuttings

**November 7th** : Wreath Making *\*RSVP Required\**

**FIRST  
TUESDAY  
OF EACH  
MONTH AT  
5:00 P.M.**

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