



Home Gardening Newsletter

October-November
2019



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Grants Available for Diversifying Farms - Info Session Oct. 3rd

WNC Agricultural Options is now accepting grant applications from farmers diversifying or expanding their businesses. With funding from the N.C. Tobacco Trust Fund Commission, WNC AgOptions is distributing a total of \$219,000 to western North Carolina farmers in 2020. The application deadline is **November 15th**.

WNC AgOptions helps offset farmers' risk of trying new ventures and expanding their farms with \$3,000 and \$6,000 grants. "The WNC AgOptions program is an excellent example of grant funds providing direct support to those who need it most," said Ross Young, Madison County Extension Director and WNC AgOptions steering committee leader. "Our farmers are arguably the most important people in our society. I sincerely appreciate the Commission's interest in supporting western North Carolina agriculture."



Applicants should contact their Cooperative Extension agents by **October 14th** to set up an appointment to discuss their projects. Applications are available at www.wncagoptions.org or at local Cooperative Extension centers. Extension agents remain a resource for farmers throughout the year as they complete their projects.

The administrator of WNC AgOptions is WNC Communities, a non-profit organization that has been improving agriculture in the region since 1947. WNC Communities provides a unique forum for leaders in western North Carolina to carry out innovative programs to improve the quality of life for rural communities and to enhance the agriculture economy. "WNC Communities is honored to be the administrator of this annual funding opportunity designed to support farmers in their quest to try new techniques or implement innovative farming practices," said Jennifer Ferre, Executive Director of WNC Communities. "We are grateful to the N.C. Tobacco Trust Fund Commission and North Carolina legislators for their support for 15 years."

Members of the WNC AgOptions steering committee include: representatives from N.C. Cooperative Extension, N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services–Marketing Division, WNC Communities, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project and other leaders in agribusiness. For more information, see the following: WNC Agricultural Options: www.wncagoptions.org; N.C. Cooperative Extension Centers: www.ces.ncsu.edu; N.C. Tobacco Trust Fund Commission: www.tobaccotrustfund.org; WNC Communities: www.wnccommunities.org.

An Outreach Information Session will be held for those who wish learn more information about the application and the WNC AG Options grant program. Jennifer Ferre the Grant Coordinator will be present to discuss the program, go over the 2020 application time line, and answer questions. The session will be held on **Thursday October 3rd** from 7:00-8:30 p.m. at the **Jackson Extension Center** on 876 Skyland Dr. Sylva, N.C. For more information, contact Christy Bredenkamp at 586-4009 or 488-3848, or visit www.wncagoptions.org to download an application.



Winter Squash and Other Fun Cucurbits

Autumn is here and now is the perfect time to enhance the amazing array of fall colors by decorating with winter squash, pumpkins and gourds. As members of the Cucurbitaceae or Cucumber Family, these vegetables offer varying colors of blue, green, orange, crème, pink, and variegated types to adorn around our front porches, business' and churches. Not only do pumpkins, winter squash and gourds come in a wide assortment of colors but also one can select from a vast medley of sizes, shapes and textures for multiple uses. While looking through magazines or surfing the Internet, it's easy to find recipes for cooking many scrumptious soups, stews and of course the traditional pumpkin pie. Many gardeners and crafters have learned how to fashion gourds into birdhouses, dippers, Luffa sponges and water bottles as part of our mountain heritage. It is well known that gourds have been cultivated for thousands of years by many cultures worldwide, including Native Americans, for their usefulness as utensils, storage containers, and as ornaments.

Winter squash grown throughout Western North Carolina, is a warm season vegetable known for having a tough outer shell that can be smooth or bumpy, thin or thick and rock hard with a wide array of colors. Winter squash differs from summer squash in that it is harvested and eaten in the mature fruit stage, when the seeds are fully mature and the skin has hardened into a tough rind. When ripened to this stage, most varieties can be stored throughout the winter season.

Edible winter squash belongs to three different species: *Cucurbita pepo* (acorn, delicata, and spaghetti types), *C. moschata* (butternut types), and *C. maxima* (Hubbard, kabocha, and buttercup types) "the true winter squash." Some varieties are small producing enough for single servings, while others produce massive vegetables of 20 pounds or more, suitable for mashing, freezing, soups and pies. While most winter squash varieties can be stored throughout winter; others should be used within a few weeks after harvest. Select varieties that cater to your taste as well as your ability to handle and store the squash. Candyroasters grown traditionally by the Cherokee, is a winter squash that has a deep orange color and can range in weight between 10-250 pounds, making it an excellent choice for canning and freezing the abundance.



Harvest

Harvest winter squash and pumpkins before a hard freeze. A light frost that kills the vine will usually not harm the fruit. Cut the fruit from the vine, leaving a few inches of stem attached. Be careful not to cut or bruise the fruit. Ideally, the pumpkins and squash should be field-cured in place for a week or two in dry, sunny weather. This dries and toughens the skin for longer storage. If the weather has turned cold or rainy, squash can be cured indoors, in a well-ventilated, warm (80°F) space.

Storage

Winter squash should be stored in a cool place around 55°F, with good air movement. Ideal humidity should range between 50% and 75%. Check squash in storage frequently and remove the ones that seem soft or show signs of spoilage.

Next Year

- Now that your interest and appetite has been piqued, consider which varieties of winter squash to grow next year. Some gardening tips to remember include:
- Wait until the danger of frost is past before planting.
- Vining squash types require at least 50 to 100 square feet per hill.
- Plant seeds one inch deep (four or five seeds per hill) and allow 5 to 6 feet between hills.
- After the plants are well-established, thin each hill to the best two or three plants and allow 7 to 12 feet between rows.
- Plant semi-vining varieties one inch deep (four or five seeds per hill) and thin to the best two plants per hill. Allow 8 feet between rows.
- Plant bush varieties one inch deep (1 or 2 seeds per foot of row) and thin to a single plant every three feet. Allow five feet between rows.
- Squash plants should be kept free from weeds by hoeing and shallow cultivation. Water if a dry period occurs in early summer. Squash requires minimal care after the vines cover the ground.

October November Horticulture Tips



Lawns

- Depending on the weather, you may still need to mow a time or two before putting the mover away for winter.
- A mulching mower can do a good job of chopping those fallen leaves if there are not too many. Another option is to put on the bagging attachment to chop and collect the leaves. They make a good addition to the compost pile.
- Do not allow a heavy layer of leaves to smother ground covers, evergreen perennials or pansies.



Fruits

- Finish fall cleanup - rake leaves and remove any fruit left in trees or on the ground.
- Do not prune fruit trees until March.
- Pull weeds in the strawberry bed and cover the plants with straw.

Vegetables

- Dig Sweet Potatoes before first frost.
- Plant lettuce, green onions, carrots, radishes and most leafy greens inside your cold frame.
- Remember to take advantage of the herb garden when preparing those holiday meals. In addition to flavoring, herbs can make lovely garnish or table decorations.
- Leafy greens can be harvested by pulling the whole plant, or by removing lower leaves and allowing the plant to continue to grow.
- Most winter vegetables, such as cabbage, broccoli and greens, do not need protection from cold temperatures until nights fall in the low 20s.
- Monitor greenhouses, cloches and cold frames daily. Temperatures heat up quickly on a sunny day
- Sow cover crops such as clover, annual rye, barley and buckwheat in fallow winter beds to improve soil structure and suppress weed.



Trees Shrubs & Flowers

- When planting trees and shrubs, pay attention to correct planting depth. Water well and apply a 3 inch layer of mulch, being careful to pull the mulch a few inches away from the stem.
- Check landscape beds for winter annual weeds. Remove them now as they will only be larger in the spring.
- If you love to have daffodils, crocus, iris and grape hyacinth blooming next spring, then plant now! Bulbs need to be exposed to cool temperatures to bloom. Its best to get them planted before Thanksgiving.
- Prune maple, birch, elm, and willow trees now through January if needed.
- Pull bagworms off shrubs to prevent re-infestation next year.

Miscellaneous Tasks

- This is an excellent time to soil sample while the test is free from April-November. A \$4.00 charge will begin during peak times from Dec-March. Results come back quickly this time of year, allowing plenty of time to start making adjustments for next season's garden.



Upcoming Bee Events

Jackson Bee Chapter - This new and growing bee chapter has their monthly meetings every 3rd Tuesday of the month (Oct. 15th & Nov. 19th), 7:00 p.m. at the Jackson Extension Center located on 876 Skyland Dr. Sylva, N.C. All those interested in Beekeeping are most welcome! Find them on FaceBook!

Smoky Mountain Beekeepers - New and veteran beekeepers from Swain and neighboring areas meet the 2nd Thursday of the month (Oct. 10th & Nov. 14th), 7:00 p.m. at the Swain Extension Center on 60 Almond School Rd.(SCC Bldg.). For more information go to website: smokymtnbeekeepr.com



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Sincerely,
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Agriculture-Horticulture



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EXTENSION

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