

A photograph of two red Adirondack chairs sitting on a green lawn covered with fallen autumn leaves. The background is a dense forest with trees showing vibrant fall colors of red, orange, and yellow.

Hey, what’s that web in my tree?

You have probably noticed masses of webbing on the ends of tree branches in your yard, your neighbor’s yard or along the roadsides? They are the work of the fall webworm, a species of caterpillar native to our region. Fall webworm outbreaks occur every year in our area and are most noticeable in late summer and fall.

The good news is Fall webworms rarely cause serious damage, however they have been noted to be unsightly.



Tent-Caterpillars



Bag worms



Charles Mitchell

Franklin County Cooperative Extension Director

Where Do They Come From?

Fall webworms are native to much of North America and are one of the few insect pests that have been introduced from our continent to other parts of the world.

The caterpillars that are currently feeding on trees in our area hatched from eggs laid by adult fall webworm moths, which are snow white and approximately 1½ inches long.

These caterpillars will feed for four to six weeks, then leave the host tree to spin a cocoon in which they will spend the winter.

Next spring adult moths will emerge from these co-

cons and mate, after which the females will lay eggs, beginning the cycle all over again.

Fall webworms are sometimes confused with Eastern tent caterpillars, which only occur in the spring and are most common on wild cherry trees.

Eastern tent caterpillars form their webs near the trunk of a tree, usually where a branch meets the trunk.

Fall webworm webs are formed at the ends of branches and do not appear until mid-summer.

Fall webworms are also sometimes incorrectly referred to as bagworms, a species of caterpillar that feeds on cedars, arborvitae and other conifers.

Bagworms do not make large masses of webbing. Instead, each caterpillar spins its own sack of webbing and plant leaves, in which it hides while feeding.

What Do They Eat?

Fall webworms have one of the widest host ranges of any insect and are capable of feeding on just about any deciduous tree species.

When small, fall webworms only eat the leaf surface, causing the remaining part of the leaf to turn brown. The mass of webbing spun by fall webworms is known as a nest.

Each nest can contain hundreds of webworms. The webworm caterpillars within a nest all hatched from the same mass of eggs laid by a female fall webworm moth. The caterpillars feed together for several weeks, expanding the web as needed.

Nests can expand to three feet across or more. Fall webworms feed within their nest until they reach full size, at which time they

crawl out of the nest, and usually away from the tree, to form a cocoon. Caterpillars from one nest will not crawl to other trees to form new nests.

Will They Hurt or Kill My Tree?

As mentioned before, the webbing and debris created by fall webworms looks unsightly, their feeding activity rarely causes serious injury to trees.

Webworms only damage tree leaves and do not kill the branches upon which their nests form.

These branches will grow new leaves next year so there is no need to cut branches out of a tree to remove the nests. Nests will naturally weather away during winter months.

Established trees can tolerate losing a considerable amount of foliage, particularly in late summer and fall.

The injury caused by fall webworm feeding is considered cosmetic, only affecting the appearance of the tree, not the tree’s health.

The exception is young, recently planted trees, which can be completely defoliated by webworms.

In this situation it is usually beneficial to treat or physically remove webworms before significant leaf loss occurs.

What Can Be Done?

Fall webworms have many natural enemies, in-



Web worms nest in a tree

cluding spiders, birds, and parasitic insects.

Pulling webs open with a stick or long pole exposes the caterpillars to predators and will help reduce their numbers.

You can use caterpillar controlling insecticides containing carbaryl or Bacillus thuringiensis.

Removing empty nests does not prevent future outbreaks because this insect overwinters in a cocoon in the soil, not in the webbing.

For more information about gardening, contact the local Franklin County Cooperative Extension Office at 919-496-3344. You can also visit the website at franklin.ces.ncsu.edu.

What is on your fertilizer bag?

When you look at a bag of fertilizer, you will see three numbers. This is called the fertilizer’s “analysis” and represents the percentage of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium that is available from the bag of fertilizer.

(Technically, it represents the percentage of N, P2O2 and K2O that is available, but for our purposes, nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium will do.)

Nitrogen is a principal plant nutrient, and is important in production and maintenance of the color and foliage of plants.

Phosphorus promotes root growth in plants and potassium promotes flowering and fruiting.

Using the fertilizer “5-10-5” as an example, the bag with this analysis will contain 5% nitrogen, 10% phosphorus and 5% potassium.

Now, you’re probably thinking that 5 plus 10 plus 5 only adds to 20%, what’s in the other 80% of the bag. Depending on the brand of fertilizer, the rest of the bag may contain some minor nutrients and filler material.

The filler material allows us to apply the nutrients evenly across the area we want to fertilize.

Without the filler material, we would over apply nutrients in some parts of

the area and under apply in others.

The filler material allows for a uniform application of the nutrients.

Understanding the fertilizer analysis is essential in purchasing and applying the right kind of fertilizer.

Your choice of fertilizer should be based on the type of plants you are growing and the results from your soil test report.

If you have never taken a soil sample, it is strongly recommend that you do so. If you have taken soil samples and have questions about your recommendations, your local Cooperative Extension Office can assist you with your questions.

You can pick up information on how to properly take a soil sample, and the materials needed in collecting your samples from your local Cooperative Extension office.

The Franklin County Cooperative Extension office is located at 103 South Bickett Boulevard Louisburg, NC 27549 or you can call (919) 496- 3344.

You can also visit the website franklin.ces.ncsu.edu for more information.

The next time you apply fertilizer, what numbers will be on your bag?

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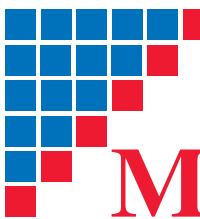


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Home renovation on a budget

Renovations around the house require an investment of time and often considerable amounts of money. Findings from the 2024 U.S. Houzz & Home Study show that home renovations are becoming more expensive. The median renovation spending for homeowners has gone up 60 percent since 2020. Angi, a home services website, reports the average renovation cost for homes between 1,250 and 1,600 square feet is \$51,772, but the final cost of home renovations depends on the scope of the project.

Homeowners who are conserving funds can rest assured that it is possible to make meaningful changes both inside and outside a home without breaking the bank. Here are some ways to renovate a home on a budget.

- Create a budget and don't waver. Figure out exactly what you can afford for a renovation and then make that your maximum dollars spent. Research comparable projects in your area and be honest about whether you can afford the renovation as-is or if you must adapt ideas to fit your price. Make sure to build in a cushion of around 15 to 20 percent for any unforeseen expenses that may arise once a renovation is underway.
- Maximize an existing floor plan. This Old House suggests looking for ways to maximize your current layout before you invest in major renovations like an expansion. Bring in a designer with an eye for utilizing space. For example, see how you might be able to replace shelves with pull-out drawers in the kitchen. Moving furniture around or rethinking floor plans also can help to lower costs.
- Balance DIY with hiring contractors. You can save money by tackling some projects yourself, but only if you are confident in your renovation skills. Rather than risk making costly mistakes and having to redo things, hire well-vetted professionals but ask if there's any DIY work you can do to cut costs.
- Check clearance and resale stores. Shop discount stores for building materials to save money. For example, if a builder ordered too many cabinets they may offer them to Habitat for Humanity ReStores, which are non-profit home improvement stores and donation centers. Checking the clearance and markdown sections of other stores may yield considerable savings on items needed for a renovation. Warehouse retailers like Costco or Sam's Club also can be great places to find certain home improvement materials and furnishings.
- Take advantage of free services. Certain stores may offer things like free consultations with designers who can show you what a renovation can look like. This is advantageous to the stores because once you see the potential you're more likely to buy the products, even if it's not mandatory.
- Resurface instead of redo. Certain items can be made to look new with



SAVE MONEY BY PLANNING AHEAD. Take the time plan carefully when beginning a home renovation project.

minimal effort. Paint is a relatively inexpensive tool that can transform walls and more. A good hardwood flooring company can buff out a floor and put a new coating instead of an entirely new floor. Kitchen cabinets can be resurfaced instead of replaced as well.

Finding ways to perform home renovations on a budget may require some creative thinking, but it's possible to get results at the right price point.

Home interior trends on the rise



WHAT'S TRENDING? Homeowners can consider these notable trends, which the online renovation experts at Houzz suggest will be particularly popular in the year ahead.

Trends that seem ubiquitous one day can seemingly vanish before the sun rises again just 24 hours later. That's especially true in the digital age, when overnight celebrities and viral videos can be on the tips of everyone's tongue before being forgotten entirely when the next online sensation emerges in an increasingly rapid news cycle.

Home trends typically benefit from a longer shelf life than viral videos and other fads that originate on the internet, and that's something renovation-minded homeowners should consider when improving their homes. Homeowners preparing to do just that can consider these notable trends, which the online renovation experts at Houzz suggest will be particularly popular in the year ahead.

- Rounded furnishings: Houzz noted that gentle curves and rounded edges embody the organic modern styles that many current homeowners love. Rounded dining tables and similarly circular coffee tables may merit consideration among homeowners who want to embrace popular trends.
- Arches: Houzz cites arches among the more

owners want, kitchen range alcoves might be just the project for them. Range alcoves call an earlier time to mind when wood burning stoves were commonplace. The report from Houzz notes range alcoves immediately draw attention, which undoubtedly adds to their appeal.

- Wood for warmth: Homeowners who hear "wood and warmth" might think fireplaces, but Houzz reports that wood elements are being incorporated into interior designs as a means to giving homes a more cozy vibe. Ceiling beams, trim, wall paneling, and cabinetry are utilizing wood to add warmth to a home.

Trends come and go, but home trends typically have more staying power than styles that emerge in other arenas. Homeowners who want to upgrade their home interiors can consider the latest trends and choose those that align with their own personal tastes.

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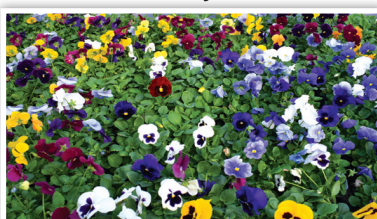
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Pumpkins - a great fall tradition

Alejandra Martinez

NC Cooperative Extension Agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources



With a chill in the air, leaves beginning to turn color, and the days shortening, Fall is certainly upon us!

What better representation of the season's arrival than a classic pumpkin? Edible, experiential, and decorative, pumpkins are surely a fall staple that bring us together for memories that last.

Some of my favorite fall memories growing up include going on hay rides while visiting pumpkin patches, carving jack-o-lanterns with my family, and painting pumpkins with friends.

Enjoying pumpkin pie at Thanksgiving is an obvious tradition, but I am particularly fond of the seeds.

Growing up, I sometimes spent Halloween evenings at my friend's house, and her family would always roast seasoned pumpkin seeds. Seems like pumpkins wind themselves into all of the fall memories.

Even though we typically think of round and orange when picturing pumpkins, they come in a wide variety of characteristics.

Some are white, green, or even speckled. Pumpkins can be warty, oblong, or flatter in shape. There are miniature pumpkins and there are massive pumpkins. You can take a trip to the N.C. State fair to see the season's largest pumpkins, some over 2,000 pounds!

According to the USDA, North Carolina produced over 45 million pounds of pumpkins in 2024. The majority of pumpkin production in our state is concentrated in the western region, where the climate and lower disease pressure is more conducive to



A FALL STAPLE. With so many varieties available, pumpkins are a must for this season.

pumpkin production.

Nonetheless, pumpkins are still grown throughout our region. Who doesn't want to lean into autumnal appreciation? We grow them more often for agritourism and ornamental purposes as opposed to consumption.

For our region of North Carolina, the journey to growing your own pumpkins begins with planting anywhere from mid-April to early July.

Pumpkins typically require anywhere from 90-120 days until maturity, depending on the cultivar you are planting.

Pumpkins need space, with about four-six feet needed between each plant and eight-ten feet needed between each row. They also require full sun and moist, well-draining soils with a pH of 6.0-6.5.

Unfortunately, we aren't the only ones that enjoy pumpkins.

Common insect pests include squash bugs, cucumber beetles, and squash vine borers.

Fungal diseases such as downy and powdery mildew are also common.

Crop rotation is a good tool to prevent pest issues, and utilizing insecticides and fungicides helps in

managing any issues.

Drip irrigation is also a good option as opposed to overhead watering to avoid disease.

Once your pumpkin is ready for harvest, indicated by even coloring and hardening of the rind and stem, cut the stem, leaving at least three inches. Make sure not to pick up the pumpkin by the stem, which can damage it and cause it to go bad faster.

To maximize your pumpkin's shelf life, make sure to cure it. This process further hardens the rind and stem, and it includes keeping the pumpkin in a warm environment, around 80 degrees F, with good air flow for 7-10 days. Curing will help your pumpkin last up to three months.

You have lots of options when it comes to this fall fruit. You can choose how you obtain the pumpkin, the color, size, and how you use it.

Whatever you choose your pumpkin experience to be, you are sure to embrace the fall spirit!

For more information or questions, contact Franklin County Cooperative Extension Office at 919-496-3344, Ag Agent, Alejandra Martinez.



See The Franklin Times for future local articles from NC Cooperative Extension.

Health benefits of pumpkins & preserving tips

Pumpkin is an incredibly nutritious food. It's nutrient dense, meaning it has lots of vitamins and minerals and relatively few calories.

Dominique Simon

NC Cooperative Extension Family & Consumer Science Agent



One cup (245 grams) of canned pumpkin provides: Calories: 137, Protein: 3 grams, Fat: 7 grams, Carbs: 19 grams, Fiber: 7 grams, Vitamin A: 209% of the Daily Value (DV), Vitamin K: 37% of the DV, Copper: 28% of the DV, Vitamin E:

22% of the DV, Iron: 18% of the DV, Magnesium: 13% of the DV, Riboflavin: 10% of the DV, Vitamin B6: 10% of the DV, Vitamin C: 10% of the DV, Potassium: 10% of the DV

It also contains smaller amounts of several other nutrients.

The vitamin A contained in pumpkin is actually in the form of vitamin A precursors beta carotene and alpha carotene. Your body can turn these powerful antioxidants into vitamin A after you consume them.

Due to high amounts of carotenoids in pumpkin, one of the health benefits of pumpkin is that it is an antioxidant.

Carotenoids are compounds that function as antioxidants, which fight free radicals that cause oxidative damage.

Ways to Eat Pumpkin

Pumpkin is popular in pancakes, pies, custards, and muffins, but it also works well in savory dishes.

You can cook it into a soup or roast it with other vegetables. Canned pumpkin can be combined with coconut milk and spices to make a creamy curry base.

You can also eat other parts of the pumpkin plant. Its seeds can be roasted for a crunchy snack or salad topping.

This time of the year comes with varieties of pumpkin flavored drinks and baked goods.

Be mindful that just because pumpkin is in the title doesn't necessarily make it healthy. Drinking pumpkin spice drinks, and baked goods often doesn't mean they have any pumpkin in them, they are only flavored with pumpkin pie spice.

Preserving Pumpkins

Pumpkins are a seasonal treat that you typically can only purchase during the fall season. If you are a pumpkin lover and you would like to be able to enjoy it for longer than one season here are ways that you can preserve pumpkin.

Freezing Pumpkin:

- Freezing is the fastest and best way to preserve pumpkin – this method changes the texture the least.
- Select mature pumpkins with smoothed-textured flesh; avoid stringy or dry pumpkins.
- Cut into chunks and remove seeds. Boil, steam, pressure cook or bake until soft.
- Once cooked, scrape the flesh from the rinds and mash.
- Place the mashed pulp into a pan and set pan in cold water and stir. Once cool, package in freezer containers (leaving ½" headspace) or freezer bags (pressing out all of the air) and seal.

Canning:

- Pumpkin is a low acid food (pH > 4.6) that requires pressure canning for proper processing to reduce the risk of botulism.
- The form of the pumpkin is important, mashed or pureed pumpkin should not be canned, as there are no current tested recipes for pumpkin in this form.
- Slice or cube pumpkin no larger than 1" and boil for 2 minutes before filling jars, fill with the boiling water to the proper headspace.
- Find tested home preserved pumpkin recipes at the National Center For Home Food Preservation website, nchfp.uga.edu.

Drying:

- To dry seeds, gently wash them to remove all of the pumpkin flesh and stringy matter.
- If using an electric dehydrator, dry at 115-120°F for 1-2 hours. Pumpkin seeds can also be dried in the oven on the lowest setting; it will take 3-4 hours. Check and stir often during oven-drying so they do not burn.
- To dry pumpkin flesh, cut into 1"x 1/8" strips and blanch. Use an electric dehydrator at 125°F for 8-10 hours until tough or brittle. Oven drying is not recommended.
- Make sure seeds or flesh are completely dry before storing. Once cool, place in a bag or jar and seal. If moisture accumulates in the bag or jar, remove and continue drying. Moist pumpkin will rot during storage.
- Store the seeds in a dry, cool, dark area. The cooler the area the longer the storage. Most dried foods are good for 4 months to a year.

For more information about Family & Consumer Science topics, contact Franklin County Cooperative Extension, 919-496-3344, FCS Agent Dominique Simon.

References: healthline.com, NC State Extension-Home Food Preservation.

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