

# Gardening News

April/May 2020



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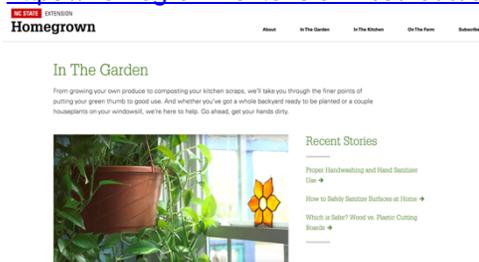
## Horticulture Therapy in Stressful Times

*“Gardening is the greatest tonic and therapy a human being can have. Even if you have only a tiny piece of earth, you can create something beautiful, which we all have a great need for.” – Audrey Hepburn, late actress and humanitarian*

As we are navigating the Covid-19 world, our gardens can become a refuge while staying home for extended periods of time. Gardens can mean different things to different people. If you live in an apartment, it may be house plants or containers of flowers or vegetables on a porch. If you have a yard, it can range from a few shrubs to an extended landscape including flowers, vegetables and other plants. Fresh air and sunshine are still free. Gardening doesn't have to be expensive. Plants can grow from seeds or little seedlings. These online sources can help you with more information in planning your gardening adventure.

### In the Garden Videos from NC State Extension:

<https://homegrown.extension.ncsu.edu/category/in-the-garden/>



From growing your own produce to composting your kitchen scraps, we'll take you through the finer points of putting your green thumb to good use in these gardening videos. Whether you've got a whole backyard ready to be planted or a couple houseplants on your windowsill, we're here to help. Go ahead, get your hands dirty.

### NC State Extension Gardener Handbook:

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook>

The Extension Gardener Handbook is a fundamental reference for any seasoned gardener, but it is written so clearly, it also appeals to beginners just getting their hands dirty. It explains the “why and how” basics for every gardening subject from soils and composting to vegetable gardening and wildlife management. Advice on garden design, preparation, and maintenance covers all types of plantings including lawns, ornamentals, fruits, trees, and containers. Dr. Lucy Bradley, Urban Horticulture Professor and Extension Specialist



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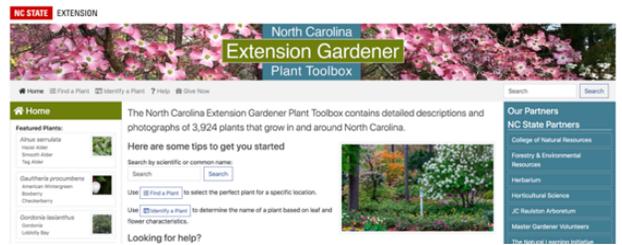
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## NC State Extension Plant Tool Box:

[plants.ces.ncsu.edu](https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu)

The North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox contains detailed descriptions and photographs of 3,924 plants that grow in and around North Carolina. The toolbox is searchable by cultural conditions, landscape use, plant traits, flower, and leaf characteristics. Under cultural conditions, consider checking the USDA Hardiness zone (<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb/>) as your first choice. Selecting the hardiness zone allows you to review plants that grow where you live.



## Vegetable Gardening:

[https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/show\\_ep3\\_pdf/1584976232/23265/](https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/show_ep3_pdf/1584976232/23265/)

## Central North Carolina Planting Calendar for Annual Vegetables, Fruits, and Herbs



April and May are a great time to get started in vegetable gardening. From a container with tomatoes to raised beds and in-ground vegetables, knowing when to plant is important. The Central North Carolina Vegetable Gardening Guide is the resource to determine what to plant, when to plant, and whether to plant seeds or transplants.

Central North Carolina is a wonderful place to garden. Almost any type of vegetable or fruit can be grown successfully provided you choose appropriate varieties and plant at the right time. The climate, the season, and potential pests all affect the selection of what and when to plant.

NC State Extension has many resources for you. See these links for more information:

**General Gardening:** <https://gardening.ces.ncsu.edu/>

**Composting:** [Composting.ces.ncsu.edu](https://composting.ces.ncsu.edu)

**Tree Fruits and Nuts:** <https://horticulture.ces.ncsu.edu/comprehensive-resources-for-fruit-trees/>

**Blueberries:** <https://blueberries.ces.ncsu.edu/blueberries-home-gardeners/>

**Muscadine Grapes:** <https://grapes.ces.ncsu.edu/resources-muscadine/muscadines/>

## Have a specific question? Want to talk to a Horticulture Agent?

Contact the Horticulture Agent in your North Carolina State University Extension Office. For Scotland County call 910-277-2422 or Hoke County 910-875-3461. We are glad to help!

## Grow Your Own Ginger!

The ginger plant (*Zingiber officinale*) is grown for its spicy, flavorful taste. The active ingredient in ginger is called gingerols. Gingerols are found in the rhizomes, which are different than roots. Rhizomes are considered underground stems with the ability to produce roots and shoots at each node.

**Buy Ginger Rhizomes:** To grow ginger at home, purchase fresh ginger rhizomes from a plant nursery or seed company source. If you can't find a source, you can use grocery store ginger. If possible, buy organic ginger as it may not be treated with sprout inhibitor. If buying regular ginger at the grocery store, soak overnight in water. Discard the water. Be sure to purchase large, fat ginger rhizomes to start your plants.

**When to start:** Ginger is a tropical plant. It will not grow outside year-round in USDA Hardiness Zones 8 and below. If you live in USDA Hardiness Zone 9, 10, or 12 and temperatures do not fall to or below 32 degrees, you can safely grow ginger outside. The rest of us can grow in containers or dig before frost. It does take about 8 to 10 months for a good crop of ginger.



[agrilifeextension.tamu.edu](http://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu)



**How to Start:** Even the tropics have seasonal changes, so just like here, follow the growing calendar. This makes mid-spring the natural time to start ginger. After purchasing your ginger rhizomes, leave on the counter in sun so the rhizomes start sprouting. It may take several weeks, so do not be concerned if it doesn't happen right away. When the buds do swell, the rhizome may turn a yellow/green color. Do not worry if the rhizomes become shriveled or sunken. Cut the ginger rhizome into 1" to 1½" pieces with at least one "eye." Let each piece with a cut end heal for a few hours or overnight. This allows the cut end to dry out and form callus before planting.

**Potting:** Because ginger is a rhizome, not a root, it needs to be planted close to the soil surface. Ginger is used to moist, well-drained soil, so the potting soil should be rich in organic matter, loose but not easily dried out. Plant the ginger rhizomes 6" to 8" apart. A 15" container or larger will give room for you plants to grow and develop more rhizomes.

Plant so that the top of the rhizome is barely covered. The sides should be well covered, with almost no soil on top of the rhizomes.

**Growing:** Grow ginger in 2 to 5 hours of direct sunlight. Be sure to protect from strong winds. You can put your ginger container outside after all danger of frost is past. Let it grow and flourish in your yard, on your patio, or deck. Remember that ginger is from the tropics and cannot tolerate standing water or completely drying out. Once your ginger has started growing leaves, consider applying a mulch to the soil surface.



Fertilizing is needed once the plants start growing. Use an organic slow release fertilizer or liquid fertilizer according to manufacturer's recommendations for the container size.

**Harvesting Your Ginger:** After 8 to 10 months, it's time to harvest your ginger rhizomes. Ginger will flower, so if waiting the 8-10 month period, harvest after flowering. If growing in containers, move indoors once the fall temperatures begin to cool off. Do not allow plants to freeze. Dig the entire plant. Choose sections to save and replant them promptly. For the rhizomes you wish to save and use, clip off the green leaves. Store your fresh ginger in the refrigerator or freezer. If left unpeeled, it can keep up to 3 weeks in the refrigerator or up to 6 months in the freezer. (agrillifeextension.tamu.edu)



## April Gardening Chores

Our average last frost date is April 15<sup>th</sup>. Earlier planting of tender annuals and vegetables may require frost protection. It is better to wait until later in the month to plant tender plants.

Lace bugs will begin to be seen on azaleas. Control with horticultural oil or pyrethroid's in April and May. Be sure to read the label and follow directions carefully. Each of these work differently.

Aphids are a common spring pest on many flowers. Wait a few weeks before treating to see if ladybugs move in to control them.

Prune spring flowering evergreen shrubs like camellia and azalea when finished blooming. They begin setting their flowers for 2021 as soon as they finish blooming.

Roses: Begin a regular spray program for roses. Visit [www.roserosette.org](http://www.roserosette.org) for more information.

USDA Hardiness Zone: Knowing your plant zone is important for making decisions on purchasing plants that will grow in your yard and garden. To find the plant zone at your home, visit <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb/>.

Lawns: Do not fertilize centipede until early June. Water and fertilize carefully — applying too much water and fertilizer encourages large patch, a destructive fungal disease of lawns. All warm season grasses can be sodded from April-July.

Trees and shrubs: Newly planted trees require regular watering through their first summer. Apply 2-3 gallons per inch of trunk diameter to the root ball at least once a week if it does not rain.

Mulch trees and shrubs to help reduce summer weeds. Apply a 3-4" layer out to the drip line but do not pile against trunks. Too much mulch (over 4") can repel water.

If you have not soil tested in the past two years, do so this month before fertilizing to see if additional nutrients or lime are needed. You can pick up soil sample boxes at Cooperative Extension. Due to Coronavirus, call the office before going. They will meet you at the door. Scotland Extension 910-277-2422 or Hoke Extension 910-875-3461.

April is a busy time the garden. Enjoy!

## May Gardening Chores

Leaf gall can be seen on azaleas and camellias at this time of year. Leaf galls look like very thick and distorted leaves. Hand-pick and remove the infected leaves from the plants. Be sure to dispose of leaves with gall fungus away from your yard.

Plant annuals and summer bulbs such as caladiums, cannas, dahlias and gladiolus.

Inspect vegetables and fruits for the following insect problems: aphids, caterpillars, lace bugs, leaf miners, mites, scales, stem borers, weevils and whiteflies. Call your local Cooperative Extension agent for best control method.

Scout for bagworms on likely plants, such as junipers and Leyland cypress. Spray the small gray worms before they build their bags; this makes control much easier in the long run.

If you have only a few transplants, wrap an aluminum foil collar around tender plants to prevent cutworms from wrapping around stems and cutting the plant off at ground level.

Remember to change direction when mowing your lawn to prevent wear patterns and other problems.

Feed houseplants that are growing and/or blooming. Consider dividing or re-potting pot bound plants.

## Know and Grow....

### American Fringetree (*Chioanthus virginicus*)

Fringetree is a small beautiful native tree. This deciduous tree grows up to 30 feet tall, but often grows to 12 to 20 feet tall. The shape of the tree is rounded and is often multi-trunked. The tree is native to moist wooded areas so keep this in mind when selecting a location.

In late spring, fragrant, white flowers mature hanging from 4- to 8-inch stalks. The small tree produces a 3/4-inch, dark blue drupe that matures in late summer. Fringetree does not grow well on acid soils. Fringetree does not require much pruning, but if you need to prune, do after the tree flowers.

Fringetrees are rarely available labeled as male or female, so unless they are purchased in bloom or with fruit present, it is impossible to know which one you are getting. Fortunately, both are beautiful. They are best transplanted when young.



Flower Form Jim Robbins [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

This plant has some susceptibility to scale and borers (particularly when grown in dry locations). Otherwise, the tree is typically pest free.

So, if you are looking for a small tree that will grow in full sun to part shade, has beautiful flowers and moderate moisture, keep American Fringetree in mind.

For more information on this plant or others for your home landscape, visit NCSU Extension Plant Toolbox at [plants.ces.ncsu.edu](http://plants.ces.ncsu.edu).

## ABC....XYZ Gardening Vernacular

### F is for Frass

Article by: Dr. Tom Turpin, Professor Emeritus, Purdue University Extension, April 2017.

Anyone recognize the long-running children's TV program on PBS called "Sesame Street"? Probably most of us do. That's because in the years following the 1969 introduction of the show it has been estimated that over 95 percent of U.S. preschoolers have seen it. That's a lot of kids, parents and grandparents who know about "Sesame Street" and its Muppet characters.

One of the recurring features of the show has been the word of the day. That segment featured a special guest such as Adam Sandler, LL Cool J or Kelly Ripan. The well-known guest and a Muppet, often Elmo, would team up to explain and demonstrate the meaning of a word.

So let's do an entomological version of the "Sesame Street" word of the day – without a guest star to help explain the meaning. Today's word is "frass." Frass is not a word you hear every day. In fact, I would wager that it is a word that many of us have never heard, much less used. That's because "frass" is a word used mainly in scientific circles.

Most dictionaries define "frass" as excrement or other refuse left by insects and insect larvae. In other words, frass is insect manure – the poop of insects. The word apparently showed up in the mid-1800s and was based on a German word that meant "devouring as a beast does."

A number of terms exist for waste material discharged from animal bodies after digestion, including "feces," "stool," "dung" and "droppings." Informally, terms such as "cow pies" and "road apples" are used to describe excrement from cows and horses, respectively.

Exactly why a specific term for insect manure was needed is not clear. But for sure, "frass" can be used to identify insects even if the insects are no longer present. Such information is useful to help solve problems with pest insects. Home gardeners generally will recognize the black pellets – the frass of hornworm caterpillars – that fall to the ground or collect on leaves of tomato plants. Sometimes hornworm frass is noticed before the green caterpillars are seen, but where there is frass there are bound to be caterpillars!

Insect pest control specialists and gardeners are likely to encounter insect frass more often than most people; however, almost all of us have noticed fly specks from time to time. The poet Karl Shapiro references insect frass in his poem "The Fly" with the line "You dot all whiteness with diminutive stool." Ladybugs are also prone to leave little spots of frass on surfaces where they crawl. Such behavior just adds insult to their presence inside our homes during the fall and winter months.



[extension.purdue.edu](http://extension.purdue.edu)

Manure accumulation is always a problem when animals such as pigs and chickens are raised in confined areas. Some of us remember cleaning the manure out of chicken houses and barns using shovels and pitchforks. The same problem exists when people grow crickets and mealworms for the fishing bait and pet food market but on a smaller scale, to be sure; however, when large numbers of insects are being produced the frass accumulates.

So, like large-animal producers before them, insect producers have begun to promote insect frass as a fertilizer product. The percentage of nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus is not as high as in bird or mammal manure, but it does have fertilizer value.

You can buy cricket frass under the name of Cricket Poo or Cricket Krap. Mealworm frass is generally called mealworm castings. Casting is the term that has been used to describe earthworm manure, a product that has long been used as a dry fertilizer or to make a nutrient tea.

So, while entomologists seem to be happy using the word “frass” in day-to-day conversation, it’s not a word I hear often from my friends. So, you can imagine that some years ago I was a bit surprised when a young woman who had taken my introductory entomology class said the most important thing she learned in the class was the word “frass.” According to the student, she was in the habit of exclaiming – no “expletive deleted” – ever so often. Now she says “no frass,” and people including her mother think that a college education has been good for her! Frassinating isn’t it?

## Common Lespedeza or Japanese clover (*Lespedeza striata*)

### Description

Common lespedeza, also known as Japanese clover, (*Lespedeza striata*) is a very common summer weed that can easily choke out thin turf. Lespedeza is mat-forming and grows close to the ground, making it difficult to cut with a mower. It flowers in late summer with pink to purple, single flowers.

### Cultural Control

Maintain a dense, actively growing turf through proper mowing, fertilizing, and watering practices. You can find a lawn maintenance calendar for your specific type of grass at [turffiles.ncsu.edu](http://turffiles.ncsu.edu). Click-on the left tab that says ‘Grasses’ and select calendar for your specific type of grass. Core aeration and traffic control will reduce compaction and encourage your grass to compete better. It is best to control this summer annual broadleaf weed in late spring or early summer because it is easier to control at this time. Increasing the mowing height with all the other cultural recommendations will help minimize lespedeza’s spread. Hand pulling is an option, especially in landscape beds where herbicides pose a possible threat to desirable plants.



Photo: Rebekah D. Wallace, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org

### Chemical Control

**In Lawns:** Cultural controls should first be implemented before applying herbicides for lespedeza control. However, after taking steps to modify lawn care techniques, chemical control may still be necessary to further reduce the lespedeza population. Herbicides should be carefully chosen according to turf species and all label instructions followed.

A three-way herbicide can be used on bermudagrass, zoysiagrass, centipede grass, St. Augustine grass and tall fescue. The active ingredients of a three-way herbicide often include the following broadleaf weed killers: 2,4-D, dicamba, and mecoprop (MCP).

Caution: Be especially careful with these products if you have centipede grass. Consider spot spraying and make sure that a rate is listed for centipede grass. Centipede grass can be damaged by 2,4-D. Application timing is critical. Make sure that centipede grass is fully greened up before applying and follow all label directions.

Read more at: <https://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/weeds-in-turf/common-lespedeza/> and <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/lespedeza/>

## Ruby Throated Hummingbirds Are Coming!

As early as April 1<sup>st</sup> and usually by mid-April, Ruby Throated Hummingbirds are coming through on their migration from Central America. They fly over the Gulf of Mexico and into the United States. Often the same bird will return to the same feeders, sometimes on the same day. Remember this because the birds and their offspring you feed this year, will be looking for your feeder in years to come.

Ruby Throated Hummingbirds are the only breeding hummingbird in Eastern North America. Most have migrated back to Central America by early November. Rufous Hummingbirds are rare but are an increasing visitor to flower gardens and feeders in our area.

### Feeding Hummingbirds

You can attract Ruby Throated Hummingbirds to your backyard by setting up hummingbird feeders or by planting tubular red or orange flowers as part of your landscape.

#### Artificial Nectar:

- One-part sugar to four parts water.
- It's not necessary to boil the water. Organisms causing fermentation may be carried by the hummingbirds as they feed.
- Store unused nectar in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.



Change the water before it grows cloudy or discolored and remember that during hot weather, sugar water ferments rapidly to produce toxic alcohol. Be careful about where you put your hummingbird feeders, as some cats have learned to lie and wait to catch visiting hummingbirds.

### Buying and Maintaining a Feeder

There are many options for hummingbird feeders. Red color is critical to attract hummingbirds. Remember you don't have to dye the nectar to attract the birds, but rather buy a red feeder. Bee guards are often around the feeding ports. Yellow bee guards attract bees and wasps; therefore, manufacturers have changed the guard color to red, resulting in bees and wasps being less likely to be found at your feeder. Built-in perches are essential as hummingbirds prefer to perch as they feed. Ease of cleaning is essential to your hummingbirds' health. Mold can grow in your feeder, so less parts and less nooks and crannies are beneficial to a healthy feeder. Once a month give your feeder a good cleaning using vinegar and scrub all mold and grime from your feeder. Rinse thoroughly before filling and hanging feeder. Size of feeder is important. If you never have fed hummingbirds before, start with a small feeder. See what happens. Base your size and number of feeders on how many hummingbirds come to your home.

Want to know more about birds? Visit Cornell's Lab of Ornithology at [www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org) or Audubon's Bird Guide at <http://www.audubon.org/bird-guide>.

Article Source: [www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org) and <http://www.audubon.org/bird-guide>

## Insects You Want in your Home Landscape Part 2

Most insects in your home landscape don't harm plants or people. These insects are called beneficial insects. They benefit the garden by improving our soil, pollinating plants, and eating the insects that actually do harm our plants.

### Identify before you spray:

Before spraying to minimize insects, be sure to know what you are spraying for and if there are already beneficial insects in place eating those detrimental insects. Insects have different stages in their life cycle. The early life stage can look very different from the mature insect. By encouraging beneficial insects, you can minimize your need to spray.

Some beneficial insects you want in your home garden include: parasitic wasps, lady beetles, ground beetle, tachinid fly, syrphid fly, green lacewing, soldier beetle, bees, spiders and dragon fly. Last time we talked about parasitic wasps, lady beetles and ground beetle. Let's look at tachinid fly, syrphid fly, and green lacewing this time.

### Tachinid Fly

Tachinid flies are parasites of various caterpillars, beetles and bugs, usually near the head. The eggs hatch almost immediately, and the young maggots feed inside the host. After feeding internally for a week or more, the tachinid fly larvae eventually kill the host insect.

Many kinds of tachinid flies are important natural controls of many insect pests, particularly caterpillars and grubs. However, tachinid flies rarely are observed by the average gardener, and their beneficial activities often are overlooked.



David Cappaert, bugwood.org  
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You can often find adults feeding on the nectar and pollen of tansy, milkweed, and Queen Anne's lace.

### Syrphid Fly

Syrphid fly (or "hover fly") adults are small yellow and black flies of varying appearance less than 1/2 inch (12.5mm) long. Many are bee mimics and are often mistaken for "sweat bees" because of their habit of hovering around a person's face and arms.

Syrphid fly adults are not predators, feeding only on pollen, nectar, and aphid honeydew. Larvae, however, are highly effective predators of green apple and spirea aphids, with each larva capable of consuming hundreds of aphids during the course of its development. After locating prey, larvae pierce them and suck them dry. They are often more effective than other predatory insects in cooler weather.

Source: [content.ces.ncsu.edu/syrphid-flies](http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/syrphid-flies)



Syrphid fly. Steve Schoof, NCSU

### Green Lacewing

Many species of green lacewings (LW) are common in North America, and many serve as important predators in Southeastern orchards. LW larvae (and, in some species, adults as well) are significant consumers of aphids, mites, thrips, lepidopteran eggs, and other soft prey.

Adults are around 1/2 to 1 inch (12.5 to 25mm) long, light green, and have netlike wings that are positioned like roofs over their bodies when at rest. Larvae, sometimes called "aphid lions," are 1/4 to 1/3 inch (6 to 8mm) long, shaped like spindles, and have forward-protruding mouthparts.

Some species of LW adults are predatory while others feed mainly on honeydew and pollen (though even these will supplement their diets with aphids). Larvae feed on green apple and spirea aphids as well as mites, thrips, and the eggs of caterpillars. Larvae impale their prey, inject an enzyme that dissolves the body contents, and then use their jaws to suck out the digested material. One lacewing may consume up to 150 aphids per week.

Source: [content.ces.ncsu.edu/lacewing](http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/lacewing)

Remember that not all insects are bad. Many are beneficial as they are nature's way of protecting plants from destructive insects. Know what you have in your garden, both vegetable and ornamentals, before spraying and killing the good insects.

Next issue we will explore soldier beetle, bees, spiders and dragon flies.



Lacewing larva feeding on green aphids. Steve Schoof, NCSU

## Community Gardening Calendar

DUE TO THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC, CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19), NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION HAS BEEN INSTRUCTED TO POSTPONE ALL CLASSES UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. PLEASE KNOW THAT THESE CHANGES ARE INTENDED TO PROTECT THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF OUR COMMUNITY. WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR PATIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING AT THIS TIME.

### QUOTE:



***We hope you find this newsletter informative and fun. Please share with a friend!  
Send questions, comments, or suggestions for articles to [shannon\\_newton@ncsu.edu](mailto:shannon_newton@ncsu.edu).***

If you are interested in learning more about any information in this newsletter, contact your appropriate Extension Center. Hoke County Center at 910-875-3461 or visit our website at [hoke.ces.ncsu.edu](http://hoke.ces.ncsu.edu) or Scotland County Center at 910-277-2422 or visit our website at [scotland.ces.ncsu.edu](http://scotland.ces.ncsu.edu). For accommodations for persons with disabilities, contact Cooperative Extension no later than five business days before the event.

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## **ABOUT N.C. COOPERATIVE EXTENSION**

North Carolina Cooperative Extension is a strategic partnership of NC State Extension, The Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA), and local government partners statewide. Extension delivers research-based education and technology from NC State and N.C. A&T that enriches the lives, land and economy of North Carolinians. Extension professionals in all 100 counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee provide educational programs specializing in agriculture, youth, communities, health and the environment.

