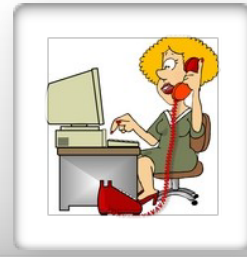


From the VCE- Bedford Master Gardener

HELP DESK



*A Bedford Area Master Gardener Association (BAMGA) newsletter column
Editor: LindaE, VCE Master Gardener Volunteer, Help Desk Coordinator
November 2014*

Although the calls to the Bedford VCE Office MG Help Desk asking for assistance start to dwindle down to a mere trickle in November, we do get them from time-to-time. Thus, the following questions have come in over the past several years, and some of them have been asked more than once. Do the answers come immediately to you? If not, continue reading for the answers.

QUESTIONS:

1. The caller wanted to know whether it was okay to compost her discarded tomato plants.
2. The caller wanted to know the best way to preserve squash over winter.
3. The gentleman came in and asked for recommendation on shrubs to block street view but not the view out of windows.

ANSWERS:

1. The usual answer here is that unless the compost pile is monitored and the internal temperature is maintained at 160 degrees F for 3 days minimum, in order to kill off any bacteria, viruses, or other pests, it is best to put tomato plants in the garbage or burn the plants.



squashes en.wikipedia.org

2. According to VCE publication #2906-1344 "Pumpkin and Winter Squash Harvest and Storage," winter squash that has not been subjected to too much accumulated chilling (below 50°F) hours and also is free from disease, decay, insects, and unhealed wounds can be selected for long-term storage.

Care should also be taken when harvesting winter squash fruit so as not to damage the rind, which is its only source of protection. Remove the stem from the squash to prevent puncture of adjacent fruit and thus spoilage.

Proper curing after harvest can help extend storage life by encouraging rapid drying of the outer cell layers. This can be done either in windrows in the field – especially with a series of warm, dry days – or by placing squash in a warm dry atmosphere (70-80°F) with good air circulation, such as a greenhouse, for up to two weeks. Curing will also allow any clean cuts made during harvest to heal over.

After curing, move squash to a dry, well-ventilated storage area. Avoid rough handling, tight packing, or piling fruit too high which can cause pressure bruises and reduction in storage life. Fruit temperature should be kept as close to the temperature of the air as possible to avoid condensation, which can lead to rot. Ideally, the storage environment should be kept at 55-60°F with a relative humidity of 50-70%. Lower relative humidity increases water loss, resulting in reduced weight, and if excessive, shriveling of fruit. High relative humidity provides a favorable environment for fungal and bacterial decay organisms.

Under ideal conditions, disease-free winter squash can be stored up to three or four months. Even if it is difficult to provide the ideal conditions, storage in a shady, dry location, with fruit off the ground or the floor, is preferable to leaving fruit out in the field. [1]

3. The client was advised to read the following two VCE publications for background: #426-701 "Shrubs: Functions, Planting, and Maintenance" and # 450-236 "Problem-free Shrubs for Virginia Landscapes." We suggested that once he had digested that information he should contact a local and reputable full-service plant nursery and ask for recommendations (within those guidelines) for plants that are known to do well in his locale.[2] [3] *Photos below from [3]*



*Ilex verticillata** (winterberry)



*Clethra alnifolia** (sweet pepperbush)



*Cepalanthus occidentalis** (buttonbush)



Viburnum carlesii (Koreanspice viburnum)



Cornus mas (Corneliancherry dogwood)

REFERENCES:

[1] <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/2906/2906-1344/2906-1344.html>

[2] <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-701/426-701.html>

[3] <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/450/450-236/450-236.html>

(All websites accessed October 23, 2014)

Answers provided herein were based on specific situations and growing conditions. These recommendations may or may not be appropriate for all circumstances. For specific recommendations for your particular situation please contact your local Cooperative Extension Office.

Bedford County Extension Office: (540) 586-7675 / **Email:** Help Desk @ BedfordMG@vt.edu

Websites: www.BedfordMasterGardeners.org and <http://offices.ext.vt.edu/bedford/>

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