

# Central Missouri Master Gardener Newsletter



## The Latest Dirt

MAY 2026

Newsletter of the Central Missouri Master Gardeners

Vol. 180 No. 01

### Note from the Chair

MAY 2026

The merry month of May has arrived. Along with the real feel of spring. How wonderful the days and night have been.

Now that we are moving away from the Spring sale and out to the various projects we are tasked with, we can enjoy planting our own garden and flower beds before we can sit back and watch the hard work pay off.

As May comes to a close, we will be having our annual BBQ this year. It will be held on May the 26<sup>th</sup>. The Tuesday after the Memorial Holiday. We have reserved the pavilion at Memorial Park this year since the pavilion at Riverside is under construction.

We are looking for volunteers to help with the BBQ for organizing and set up, and sign-up form for those attending. More information will be forth coming through emails, the Facebook page, as well as our website. So, keep an eye out for more information to come.

Please remember to log your hours as we go through the summer months so that we are letting the Extension Office know that we are making the communities areas beautiful.

Please feel free to reach out to me as we are looking for members for our board and really need your support in this matter. We cannot go on without a CMMG board to guide us as we go forward. Your support is what keeps this group running and without it we cannot survive. Even if you have previously been on the board and would like to return, we would welcome you back as your guidance would be most supportive. Position that we need to fill are the Chairperson, Secretary and other board members that are rotating off the board.

Have a wonderful May and look forward the seeing everyone at this years BBQ at Memorial Park.

CMMG Chair, Edward Vitela

2025-2026

**NEW**

**History Corner**

**\*NEW**



Susan Stork and Jim Wilson

## Central Missouri Master Gardener Newsletter

### 8 Bugs You Should Never Kill in Your Garden

By [Carol J. Alexander](#)

Not all garden bugs are created equal. Some pollinate flowers or feed on destructive pests. Meet eight bugs you should be happy to see.

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GETTY IMAGES

#### Mealybug Destroyer

[Mealybugs](#) are those annoying armoured beetles that you'll often find in your garden or indoor greenhouse. They're a problem for gardeners because they feed on plant juices, and carry and spread plant disease. Enter the mealybug predator, or *Cryptolaemus montrouzieri*. Specifically brought from Australia for pest control, the mealybug destroyer is harmless to plants and humans, but as a larvae and adult, eats [aphids](#) and other soft shelled pest insects, and of course, mealybugs.

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LIGHTSPRING/SHUTTERSTOCK

#### Praying Mantis

The largest and most formidable of garden insects is the [praying mantis](#). This “faithful” insect features a large triangular head with bulging eyes and a long body in which they conceal their wings. Mantises have enlarged forelegs used for catching and holding prey. Yes, to satisfy their enormous appetites, these predators feed on other bugs like aphids, caterpillars and beetles. If you find this [beneficial insect](#) in your garden, do not kill it. If you find one somewhere else, put it in your garden.

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ANCHA CHIANGMAI/SHUTTERSTOCK

#### Spiders

If you are terrified of spiders, understand they mean your garden no harm. In fact, they weave their webs to catch those bugs you don't want eating your plants. Will they bite you? Probably not. And if they do, chances are the bite will kill you is pretty slim. Your average garden spider is non-lethal, at least to humans.

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MAHIRART/SHUTTERSTOCK

### Lady Beetle

Commonly known as the [ladybug](#), the lady beetle (*Hippodamia convergens*) eats aphids, mites, other soft-bodied bugs and all the eggs she can find. Not only is the ladybug a bug you want to keep around, some gardeners even buy them in bulk to introduce them to their garden.

Do not, however, confuse the lady beetle with the Japanese or [Asian beetle](#) (*Harmonia axyridis*). This invasive species, while equally harmless in the garden, is a pest that invades homes and buildings in large numbers, just like the dreaded [stink bugs](#).

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BRETT HONDOW/SHUTTERSTOCK

### Braconid Wasp

If you love tomatoes, you will love what the Braconid wasp can do for you. An enemy of the dreaded [tomato hornworm](#), this wasp lays its eggs just under the skin on the back of the worm. When the eggs hatch, the larvae feed on the insides of the hornworm, literally eating it alive. The larvae then chew their way out through the skin and spin a cocoon on the back of the hornworm. Of course, the hornworm eventually dies. And your tomatoes are saved!

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MAURICIO ACOSTA ROJAS/SHUTTERSTOCK

### Bumblebee

Everyone knows about the threat to the [honeybee](#) and the concerns about colony collapse disorder. But, maybe you didn't realize that *all* of our plant pollinators are threatened. In fact, several species of [bumblebee](#) are included on the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's list of endangered species](#). These harmless bees are important because they pollinate plants that other native bees or European honeybees cannot.



BOZA C/SHUTTERSTOCK

## Green Lacewing

In its larval stage, the green lacewing is known to devour over 200 aphids in a week, as well as other soft-bodied pests. That's a lot of bugs. They continue this feeding frenzy for two to three weeks before spinning into tiny cocoons. The adults feed on nectar and pollen but continue the beneficial cycle of eating aphids by laying up to 200 eggs on the underside of leaves.

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TOMASZ KLEJDYSZ/SHUTTERSTOCK

## Aphid Midge

The tiniest of [flies](#), the aphid midge stands tall on its slender legs with its antennae positioned backward over its head. Its larvae are bright orange and feed on soft-bodied pests. Because they eat 60 different species of aphids, these beneficial bugs are invaluable in the garden. In fact, they can wipe out aphids faster than the lady beetle or green lacewing.

Introducing beneficial insects to your garden is one way to manage your bug population. However, there are other [natural methods of insect control](#) for critter-proof gardens and planters.

## 10 Perennial Plants You Should Cut Back in Spring



By [Luke Miller](#)

[Birds & Blooms Editorial Policies](#)

Published on Feb. 20, 2025

Get ready for a new growing season with this list of perennials to cut back in spring. These plants will benefit from spring pruning.

### Spring Plant Pruning Basics

Effective pruning depends on three things. Timing. Technique. And sharp tools for a crisp, clean cut that seals more quickly than a ragged cut.

Use hand pruners for stems less than 1/4-inch thick, loppers for stems up to 1/2-inch thick, and a Japanese pruning saw or a bow saw for woody stems thicker than that. Early spring is a good time to cut back many perennial plants because they are dormant and won't lose energy-producing foliage.

Keep this list of perennial plants to cut back in spring handy as you get ready for a new growing season.

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marketlan/Getty ImagesGirl pruning rose bushes with secateurs

## Cutting Back Roses in Spring

Roses come in various growth habits, from long-stem hybrid teas, [grandifloras and floribundas](#) to mound-forming shrubs and sprawling ramblers. Because long-stem roses often suffer some winter dieback, spring is a good time to see where living green tissue ends and dead brown stem takes over.

When [pruning roses](#), cut brown stems back to the green portion, cutting diagonally just 1/4-inch above a bud. Spring is also the time to thin out [overgrown rose bushes](#), removing a few of the thickest, old stems.

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Walters Gardens, Inc 'Autumn Fire'

## Upright Sedum

Upright sedums, such as the popular [Autumn Joy](#), are a multi-season attraction. They even make a [pretty sight when the flowers fade](#) — the mounded caps look nice dusted with snow. These are low-maintenance succulents.

In spring, it's time to remove the stems down to the base of the plant to allow for new growth. Cut perennial sedum stems as close to the base of the plant as possible and wait for spring growth to appear a few weeks later.

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## Sunchokes

This perennial sunflower (*Helianthus*), also known as [Jerusalem artichoke](#), is often cut down in fall. However, it's better to leave it standing because the stems make it easier to pull the edible tubers out of the ground late in the season. Those left undisturbed can be cut to the ground in late winter or early spring, using loppers or a pruning saw. The thick, dead stems can be cut into pieces for mulch.

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www.provenwinners.com 'Arctic Fire' dogwood

### Red Twig and Yellow Twig Dogwood

These [Cornus shrubs](#) are a welcome sight in late winter and early spring, when the stems are fully exposed and the bark is most colorful. Remove some of the oldest stems (they're thicker and darker) to make room for more colorful juvenile growth.

It's also time to remove any stems that are dead or injured from animal browsing. Use loppers to cut back stems as close to the base as possible.

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Courtesy Clifford Ivy Cut back perennial butterfly bush in spring.

### Butterfly Bush

[Butterfly bush](#) (*Buddleja davidii*) is root hardy in cold winter areas. The top growth dies back to the ground, but the roots remain alive and capable of pushing out new growth in spring. In that case, cut the perennial plants down to the base with loppers in spring.

**Editor's note:** In some areas, butterfly bush is [considered invasive](#). Either plant a [sterile variety](#) or deadhead flowers immediately after blooming.

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Courtesy Sujata Roy Gray catbird on beautyberry

### Beautyberry

[Beautyberry](#) (*Callicarpa*) is hard to miss in the fall with its shiny purple or pink berries. The trouble is, it tends to suffer a fair amount of winter damage, which is why it's advisable to prune the shrub in spring. Remove all dead growth even if it means chopping the plant down to within 6 inches of the ground. It will regrow, flower and [produce berries](#) all in the same season.

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www.provenwinners.com 'Beyond Midnight' bluebeard

### Bluebeard

**Bluebeard** (*Caryopteris*) often dies back to the ground where winters are cold. As such, it is considered more of a flowering perennial than a woody shrub. Use loppers or hand pruners to cut bluebeard back to about 6 inches. It blooms in mid-to-late summer on new growth, so you won't miss out on flowering.

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Courtesy Michele Tippe

Add black-eyed Susans to your list of perennials to cut back in spring.

### Black-eyed Susans

**Black-eyed Susans** (*Rudbeckia*) dazzle with their golden flowers in late summer. Many gardeners **let the flowers go to seed**, leaving the stems in place to feed the birds and keep some structure in the perennial garden over winter.

In spring, remove the dead flower stems at the base of the plant with a sharp pair of hedge shears. Black-eyed Susan is one of many **wildflowers** that do well in home gardens.

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Courtesy Cynthia Nelson

### Chrysanthemum

While **florist mums** are often grown as Annuals, **chrysanthemums** are fall favorites that sometimes overwinter successfully in USDA Plant Hardiness Zones 5 to 7. The secret is to **plant them early in the season** so plants have time to establish their roots, and use mulch to help them survive the winter.

In spring, remove the mulch and cut the dead portion back to the base with sharp hedge shears or hand pruners. Small green rosettes should already be forming at the bottom. Chrysanthemums are an **easy container plant**.

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Courtesy Jaide Ryks

## Purple Coneflower

[Purple coneflower](#) (*Echinacea purpurea*) is another perennial to leave in place over winter. The seedheads of this hardy prairie plant [feed various birds](#) while lending a little height to the sleeping perennial garden. In spring, use hedge shears or loppers to cut plants to the base, allowing for new growth.

**Author-**Luke Miller is an award-winning garden editor with 30 years of experience in horticultural communications, most of it with Better Homes & Gardens special interest publications, Garden Gate magazine and Lowe's Creative Ideas. He's written about a number of gardening topics for Birds & Blooms, as well.

## 5 Vegetables You Should Always Buy Frozen (Not Fresh)

Keep them stocked at all times for healthy, easy meals.

By [Sheela Prakash](#)

Published December 01, 2025



Simply Recipes / Adobe Stock.

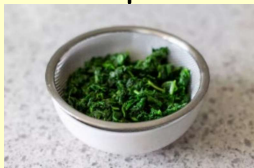
### Key Takeaways

- Frozen spinach is dirt-free, super convenient, and nutrition stays locked in.
- Frozen corn tastes just as sweet as summer kernels and skips the shucking hassle.
- Keep frozen butternut squash: cheaper, ready to sauté, soup-friendly, and mess-free.

As much as I love walking over to my neighborhood farmers market every week and packing my tote bags with a colorful array of produce, I am not above the freezer aisle. In fact, I might argue that the freezer aisle at your go-to grocery store is just as much of a treasure trove of produce. All frozen produce is flash-frozen at the peak of ripeness, which ensures it's as nutritionally dense as possible. Plus, it's much more affordable than buying fresh, which can make all the difference, especially in our current world of inflated prices.

Not all frozen vegetables are created equally, however. While they are all budget-friendly and wholesome (so long as you buy frozen vegetables that aren't in a sauce or overly seasoned), some are especially worth their weight in gold. In fact, there are a few vegetables that I almost exclusively buy frozen because of just how exceptionally useful they are in the kitchen. Here are the 5 best vegetables to buy frozen.

- Spinach



Coco Morante

The night I chewed my way through a mouthful of sandy spinach was the night I declared frozen spinach superior. While baby spinach is a quick convenience I love raw or cooked, bunches of mature spinach need to be cleaned thoroughly to rid them of dirt and sand. That's why it's hard to beat frozen spinach, be it chopped or in whole leaf form. I prefer bags of frozen spinach rather than the boxes because you can shake out just what you need instead of thawing the entire brick. Toss it still-frozen into smoothies, soups, and [curries](#), or thaw it and squeeze out any excess liquid before adding it to [frittatas](#) or using it as a pizza topping.

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- Corn



Simply Recipes / Micah Siva

Peak-summer fresh corn is unbeatable, but the season is short. Frozen corn is your next best option the other three seasons of the year. It's as sweet as the summer stuff and gets bonus points because you don't have to shuck it. Defrost the kernels and turn them into quick and satisfying [fritters](#), use them to bulk up cheesy quesadillas, or tuck into [creamed corn](#) when you're craving a cozy side dish.

- Artichokes



Sally Vargas

Not only are fresh artichokes hard to source most of the year, they're difficult to [prepare](#). Frozen artichoke hearts, however, are available 365 days a year and require zero prep. While you could say the same of canned or jarred artichokes, frozen artichokes are both cleaner in flavor and brighter in flavor and more versatile since they aren't packed in oil or brine. Frozen artichoke hearts only need to be partially thawed before stirring them into [pasta](#) or risotto. Or let them shine on their own as a side dish by tossing them olive oil, salt, and pepper and [roasting](#) on a hot sheet pan until the edges crisp and caramelize.

- Peas



Simply Recipes / Mihaela Kozaric Sebrek

A bag of frozen peas isn't just useful for icing a sore knee! They're the most quick-cooking frozen vegetable of the bunch and deserve a spot in your freezer all year long. They lend color and sweetness to everything from [rice](#) to [pasta](#), but can also stand on their own. You don't even need to cook them in order to use them in [salad](#). Or blend them with toasted nuts, garlic, cheese, and olive oil for a surprising yet oh-so vibrant twist on [pesto](#).

Continue to 5 of 5 below

### 5. Butternut Squash



Elise Bauer

While you can buy pre-cut fresh butternut squash, it can be a bit expensive due to its convenience. Frozen cubed butternut squash is just as convenient and much more budget-friendly. Blend it into [soups](#) and [pasta sauces](#), toss it into a quick vegetable [sauté](#), or even steam or microwave it until tender and puree to use in quick bread.

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## RECIPE TIME

### Creamy French Onion Chicken and Rice Casserole By Mrs. Brown's Kitchen



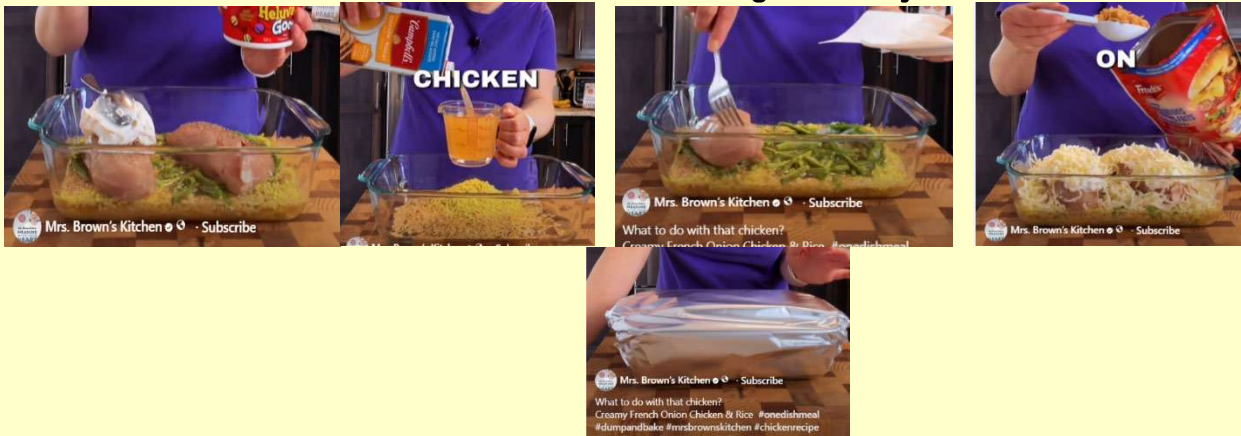
Need a fast meal here it is!

#### Ingredients:

- 1 pkg Knorr Chicken and Rice
- 1 Cup of chicken broth
- 1 small bag of frozen green beans (I would use peas)
- Chicken breasts or thighs or tenderloin
- Season the meat with your favorite seasonings
- 1 large spoonful of French onion dip on each piece of meat. Making sure you Use a new spoon to dip each time
- Shredded Mozzarella cheese
- Crispy Fried Onions
- Dried parsley flakes

#### Directions:

- Preheat the oven to 350°F
- In a 9x13 pan
- Put in the pkg of Chicken and Rice
- Pour chicken broth over and mix it in- can use water if you want
- Add the green beans (peas or frozen veggie of your choice)
- Place the chicken breasts (thighs or tenderloin) on top and season meat well
- Slather the meat with the dip
- Add the shredded cheese – using as much or as little as desired
- Sprinkle the Fried onions over top, “measure with your heart” Quote from Mrs. Brown
- Sprinkle on the parsley flakes
- Cover the pan with aluminum foil
- Place it in the oven and bake until the chicken is done (165°F) and rice is no longer crunchy



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HAPPY BIRTHDAY!  
MAY



Hawthorn



Lily of the Valley



Meetings are held at the Missouri River Regional Library, 214 Adams St, Jefferson City, MO  
We hope to see you there!

Online Reporting Site: Hours must be entered at [https://vms.momg.org/sec Login/](https://vms.momg.org/sec>Login/) please remember you need to enter hours on a computer, not a tablet or a phone. Again, all hours must be entered on line.

Enter your hours again starting in January.

Any emails that need to be distributed to ALL MG's should be sent to **CMMG Cole County Master Gardener** <[cmmg@missouri.edu](mailto:cmmg@missouri.edu)>— please don't call in messages

CMMG Official WEBSITE-- <https://extension.missouri.edu/counties/cole/extension-master->

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