Rain Barrel Workshop
Tuesday, April 15th
Ozark Fairgrounds @ 6:30 p.m.
Cost: $30/barrel

A rain barrel is a container that catches rainfall off of the roof of a shed, barn, or home. Since rainfall is collected from the roof, it picks up little contamination and is perfect for watering gardens and house plants. There is nothing better than rainfall when talking about water quality for plant life. Building and installing a rain barrel is a fun and smart way to save money and water resources at home by reducing the dependency of municipal water. Harvest the spring showers to keep your flowers and gardens looking beautiful through dry spells with this rain barrel clinic. This hands-on workshop will teach you how to build your own rain barrel to take home and use. There is a fee of $30 per barrel to cover barrel expenses and pre-registration is mandatory in order to allocate resources for this workshop. Contact the Extension Office at 667-3720 or 965-2272 to register for the course.

Low-Tech Shielded Weed Application

Roundup (Glyphosate) is one of the most used and abused herbicides on the market. We see numerous accounts of glyphosate damaged plants that come through the extension office. The most common reason for herbicide damage is a process called drift. Herbicide drift is easy to define but complicated to discuss because it can have many applications from temperature inversion, wind drift, humidity, or an accidental squirt from the sprayer at the wrong time. One way to avoid glyphosate damage is to make your own funnel at home to limit the exposure to undesirable plant damage. One simple way to avoid drift is to outfit the nozzle of a sprayer with a milk jug that has been modified to for a shielded application. The simplest way is to cut the bottom of a milk jug off with scissors and tape the top over the nozzle of the sprayer. This is a temporary solution but may help you avoid glyphosate damage.
Honeybee Workshop
Tuesday, May 27th – 6:30 p.m.
Ozark Extension Office

pre-register for the course to attend. 479-667-3720.

Keeping honeybees is an increasingly popular activity for both leisure and profit. Whether it is to increase pollinators in the garden or to harvest your own honey, beekeeping can be a fascinating and rewarding hobby. Honey bee hives can be managed safely and productively, even in urban areas. Keeping bees can be a relaxing and enjoyable pursuit, immersing you directly into the natural world. As a hobby or a sideline venture, keeping honeybees can be a perfect activity for you and your family to enjoy together!

To get started keeping bees, you will need a little space, some special tools, honeybees, and a hive for them to live in. Necessary equipment can be mail ordered from suppliers who specialize in beekeeping. Arkansas has over 20 local organized associations or clubs with Ft. Smith housing our closest association to Franklin County. These groups are composed mainly of hobbyists, who meet on a regular basis to socialize and discuss current beekeeping conditions and issues. New beekeepers can learn from those with experience, and can often find a mentor who can give them some one-on-one help with their hands in the hive. Some clubs purchase expensive equipment, such as honey extractors, for use by members. To find local suppliers and beekeeping enthusiasts, checkout the Arkansas Beekeepers Association at www.arbeekeepers.org.

The bee hive is the bees' house. It is where they live and raise their young, and where they store their delicious golden honey. A bee hive is full of wooden frames, each of which hold a single wax comb. By encouraging the bees to build their combs in these wooden frames, beekeepers can remove the combs to examine them without disturbing or destroying all of the bees' hard work. Honeybee hives can range from $350-400 for an initial investment cost but remember these are startup costs and will last for many years if properly cared for. A single hive can produce anywhere between 50-100 pounds of honey each year if conditions are favorable.

The hives must be constructed and placed in an appropriate area away from heavy foot traffic prior to introducing the new bees. Honeybees are not naturally aggressive creatures, but may react defensively when they feel their hive is threatened. Most municipalities allow bees depending on interpretation of city ordinances, but be considerate to neighbors if establishing a hive in an urban setting. For more information about apiculture, visit our website at www.uaex.edu.
Arkansas Native Plants

Arkansans have always been conscientious about the environment, but today, sustainable gardening or "going green" seems to be of the utmost importance. When choosing plants for the landscape, many gardeners are looking for reliable performers which are showy, yet need minimal care. Easy care plants should not be invasive. One group of plants that seems to fit almost all of those criteria is native plants.

Caption (photo below): Illicium or Florida anise is a blooming shrub for shade.

There are many definitions for native plants—native to Arkansas, native to the south, or simply native to the United States. As one person put it, all plants are native somewhere! However, to fit our criteria of low maintenance, able to adapt to Arkansas growing conditions and non-invasive, gardeners should look a bit closer to home when choosing natives. Plants that have been surviving on their own along roadsides and in wooded areas in the south, should be well adapted to growing in our home landscapes. Native plants (also called indigenous plants) are plants that have evolved and adapted to local conditions over thousands of years. They have adapted to the geography—including rocky soil or heavy clay, and climate of that region—whether hot and dry, or hot and humid. Most regional natives are vigorous and hardy, so can survive summer heat, winter cold, dry conditions or wet ones without additional care. When choosing native plants for your own yard, match the conditions you have—sun or shade, wet or dry.

Each native plant species is a member of a community that includes other plants, animals and microorganisms. The natural balance in that community keeps each species in check, allowing the native plant to thrive in conditions where it is suited, but preventing it from taking over the garden. Thus, native species rarely become invasive, as plants introduced from other areas can be—(consider privet, kudzu, bamboo and vinca—all introduced and all highly invasive). A community of native plants provides habitat for a variety of native wildlife species such as birds and butterflies. Once established, they require little to no irrigation or fertilization, however they may flourish with a little extra care in your garden. Native plants are resistant to most pests and diseases—there is no one to spray or monitor for pests in the wild, yet they still survive. Native plants suit today's interest in "low-maintenance" gardening and landscaping.

Often a misconception about native plants is that they are weedy and only used in a meadow or natural setting. Many great native perennials and shrubs are mainstays in gardens, including Echinacea (purple coneflower), Solomon's Seal (Polygonatum multiflorum), Rudbeckia (Black-eyed Susan), and native ferns. Native shrubs include yaupon holly, Beautyberry – Callicarpa, Calycanthus (Sweet Shrub or Carolina allspice), Illicium (Florida Anise), native azaleas and Clethra (Summersweet). Of course many recognize the native trees, including oaks, hickories, pines and cedars, but think of the more ornamental species: Dogwoods, redbuds and magnolias.

Caption (photo right): American beautyberry in full flowering glory.

How native is your native will always be debated among plant folks, however, most gardeners are interested in what works. Giving gardeners success without heavy maintenance schedules is important. Choosing plants that not only thrive, but don't spread prolifically is also important. Whether the plant is the native species or an improved cultivar of that native—a "nativar", really doesn't matter. What does is that we match the conditions in our yards with the conditions a plant needs to grow. So if you are looking for reliability and low maintenance, look no further than native plants; you have many options to choose from.