The Grapevine

Johnny Appleseed

One of my favorite stories as a child was the tale of Johnny Appleseed spreading apples across the United States. The thought of someone selflessly planting apple trees to help others resonates with many across the country. If you didn’t know, the story of Johnny Appleseed is based on a real-life person who did spread apples across the eastern part of the United States. While history remembers him as a wanderer he actually was a careful businessman. In honor of his birthday this week, let’s explore the history of Johnny Appleseed.

Johnny Chapman who would later get the nick-name Johnny Appleseed was born September 26, 1774 in Massachusetts on the family farm. His adventures didn’t start till 1794 when he was 18 and Johnny with his 11-year-old brother Nathaniel traveled west following a steady stream of immigrants. He would carry a leather bag of apple seeds he received from cider mills and would use them to plant apple orchards as he traveled around the country. While the story of Johnny Appleseed makes it seem like he planted apple seeds at random to feed communities he actually did so with a strategic business plan. Johnny would carefully cultivate his apple “nurseries” to develop as orchards for several reasons. Orchards were an important part of establishing the legal ownership of land. To prove their homesteads to be permanent, settlers were required to plant 50 apple trees and 20 peach trees in three years, since an average apple tree took roughly ten years to bear fruit. Johnny would do the difficult work of planting the orchards on property and then sell it to future settlers. He planted cider apples in his orchards because hard apple cider was an essential part of the American table at the time. They left the alcohol aspect out of my childhood story of Johnny Appleseed. Johnny planted his orchards along the routes that pioneers used to move west and allowed him to stay ahead of other orchards that might come in later to compete for cider production. Because he was unmarried he was able to have a nomadic lifestyle and moved with the settlers. At the time of his death Johnny owned quite a bit of land in throughout Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana. Why did he only plant seeds for his orchards instead of using grafted plants? Johnny’s religious beliefs at the time forbade grafting as his church felt that caused the plants to suffer. He was a vegetarian and also a staunch animal welfare supporter due to his religious beliefs.

Johnny Chapman was not just a good businessman but he was also loved by settlers because he shared news and information from surrounding communities along with serving as a missionary for his church. He would often gift seedlings to struggling pioneers and was known to give his nice clothes to people he deemed needed it more. This generosity is the origin in his story that he wore no shoes, had a tin hat and wore gunny sacks for clothes. Through his life he would spend 50 years travelling developing fruit orchards before he retired from traveling and moved back in with his brother Nathaniel who helped him start his remarkable journey. Johnny died in March of 1845 in Indiana leaving behind a legacy of apples throughout the Midwest.

While my childhood story of Johnny Appleseed is not entirely correct, the history of what Johnny Chapman did and his methods planting orchards are still just as fascinating now as the original story I heard. Even though he planted cider apples that weren’t fit for eating I hope that you will celebrate his birthday by eating an apple in his memory. Happy Growing everyone and have a wonderful week!!
Oak Mites

There have been a few people itching in Butler County due to this teeny tiny mite. This mite, it’s not an insect, bites humans causing itchy bites and, in some cases, secondary bacterial infections. Oak mites prefer pin oaks but will also live on red or black oaks. These mites are associated with another insect, the oak marginal leaf fold gall, and that is one way you might be able to tell if your oak tree is infested since they are so tiny they are microscopic. The oak marginal leaf fold gall midge lays eggs on the margins or edges of leaves leading to the edges rolling similar to the photo on the right. The female oak mites enter the leaf fold gall and injects a neurotoxin in the larvae of the midge that formed the gall so she can feed upon that larvae. The females then lay 200 to 300 eggs in the gall. Once the eggs hatch they complete their development to an adult in a week, the males’ mate with the females and then die. Oak leaf itch mites emerge from the leaf galls in late July and continue to feed through fall till they drop from the trees to overwinter in leaf litter on the ground. It’s estimated as many as 400,000 mites can fall from a tree in a day to be either carried by the wind or fall to the ground. These mites land on humans or pets to eventually bite them. Bites usually occur on the upper body around the neck, shoulders and chest where the mites land but they may also show up on hands or arms if you petted an animal that had the mites on them. These bites can be distinguished from chigger bites from their location as they don’t occur in areas where clothes are tight. After landing on a human, oak leaf itch mites start biting, and symptoms appear in 10 to 16 hours. Bites may be visible on the skin as raised, red areas with a small, centralized blister. The itchy bites can be painful when scratched, and scratching can lead to secondary bacterial infections. Unfortunately, there are very few strategies to prevent oak leaf itch mites from infesting your oak trees. Repellants used for chiggers or mosquitoes are not effective against these mites and miticide sprays will not reach these mites due to the gall they are hiding in. One prevention strategy is to use Tanglefoot as a two inch band about five feet above the ground to prevent the mites from reaching the galls in the tree. The best way to prevent getting bitten is to avoid oak trees that have the leaf fold galls on them and to take a bath when you get home to wash the mites off. If you do get bitten use anti-itch creams to minimize the itch.

Skunk Damage in Yards

Skunks have been out and about in the area causing damage to lawns and gardens. In the fall these mammals tend to dig in the yard searching for grubs and other insects in the soil as they fatten up in preparation for winter. Kansas has two species of skunk, the spotted skunk and the striped skunk. The spotted skunk or “civet cat” is now rare to find in our area and is currently listed as an endangered species. The most common is the striped skunk with its characteristic two white stripes down the back and pungent odor. While they are probably the wildlife we least like to see when we are on a walk these critters are an important part of the ecosystem as half of their diet is insects with the remainder being fruit and mice. In the fall, young skunks are weaned by their mothers in what’s termed the “fall shuffle” and this is often when you will see skunks in yards, killed on the road and close to people and animals. Skunks have a very good sense of smell and will seek out grubs by smell in lawns then dig them up, similar to the photo at the right, searching for their next meal. The best way to keep skunks out of the yard is prevention. Check for grubs in your lawn and treat when you have 10 or more per square foot. Block any openings that skunks may decide to use as a den, especially in the spring when the females are looking for places to have their young and keep a fence around your compost piles to prevent skunks from trying to use them as a food source during the summer. If skunks continue to be a problem you can try to trap them using a live trap. Bait the trap with canned cat food or canned tuna, be sure to place the food at the back of the trap, and leave it out at night. Traps should be set in areas where skunks are expected to be, such as near den openings, along sides of buildings, near trails or fence openings. Traps can be set in the open or concealed with boards or grass. Always set traps in shady areas on a flat, smooth surface, using drift fences to guide skunks into the traps. Kansas law requires that traps be inspected at least once a day. Be aware that in urban areas you will likely catch some neighborhood cats in your trap along with any skunks. If you catch a skunk cover the trap with a tarp or dark cloth to help keep the skunk calm before you relocate the. It is important to note that most skunks
that are moved from their home range do not survive in their new home. Any skunk exhibiting aggressive tendencies should be handled with caution as they may have rabies. Contact animal control and keep pets or other humans away till the skunk is captured to prevent being bitten by possibly rabid skunks. If your pet or a human has been sprayed by a skunk there are treatments. In an open container, mix together ¼ cup baking soda, a fresh 1-quart bottle of 3 percent hydrogen peroxide, and 1-2 teaspoons of liquid dish detergent. This solution must be used right away and cannot be stored. For pets and people, thoroughly work the mixture into the fur, hair, or skin, avoiding the eyes and mouth, and leave on for 5 minutes. Then rinse with fresh water and repeat if necessary. If a skunk has sprayed under your house or in a building there is a product you can get through the Extension office called Nil Odor that will help get rid of the smell.

**Video of the week: Saving Seeds for Next Year**
Saving seeds can save you money on planting flowers next year, and it’s a fun activity for the kids. There are several techniques, but all you need is a piece of paper and an envelope. Watch the video here: [https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/saving-flower-seed-to-plant-next-year](https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/saving-flower-seed-to-plant-next-year)

**Reminders**
- Buy spring flowering bulbs while the selection is still good
- Harvest winter squash when the rind is hard enough it isn’t easily punctured by a fingernail
- Remove suckers and watersprouts from fruit trees

**Ground Beef Stuffed Butternut Squash**

**INGREDIENTS**
- 2 large butternut squash
- 1 tablespoon olive oil (or your favorite cooking oil)
- 1 pound extra lean ground beef, browned and drained
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 3 garlic cloves, crushed and minced
- 4 mushrooms, chopped
- 1 large tomato, chopped
- 1 yellow bell pepper, diced
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- Cayenne pepper
- Salt and pepper (to taste)
- 4 tablespoon Parmesan cheese, grated

**DIRECTIONS**
Preheat oven to 400 F. Cut the butternut squash into halves and remove its seeds with a spoon. Line a baking tray with parchment paper and lay the butternut squash halves on it. Roast for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, heat the olive oil in a skillet. Add the ground beef and cook it until brown, stirring often. Add the onion, garlic and mushrooms. Cook until the onion softens.

Add the tomato, bell pepper, thyme, oregano, cayenne pepper, salt and pepper. Stir and cook further for about 15 minutes on medium-low heat. Remove the roasted butternut squash from the oven and scoop out some of the flesh, to make room for the stuffing. Stuff the butternut squash halves equally with the beef mixture and top with grated Parmesan. Return to the oven and cook for 10 more minutes. (Source: [https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension/recipes/ground-beef-stuffed-butternut-squash](https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension/recipes/ground-beef-stuffed-butternut-squash))
Upcoming Events

- **September 30th at 10 am - Feeding the Birds in Winter - Rose Hill Public Library**
  There is nothing more enjoyable on a cold winter day than watching the cardinals and gold finch flitting on the feeder and frolicking in the snow. While feeding the birds can be simple there are a few tips and tricks that can help you be more successful attracting birds to your feeders in the winter. Join us at the Rose Hill Public Library on September 30th at 10 am to learn more about feeding the birds and making your backyard attractive to our feathered friends this winter. This event is free and pre-registration is not required.

- **October 4th at Noon - Putting your Garden to Bed: Winter Garden Prep**
  The growing season is nearly over, but your garden work may not be done just yet. Join Anthony Reardon, Johnson County Horticulture Extension Agent, as you learn about all of the various gardening tasks that can help your landscape throughout the winter and prepare your garden for the growing season to come. This class is offered online via Zoom. For more information on the Garden Hour series or to register visit here: https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/

- **October 15th from Noon to 4 pm - Houseplant and Perennial Plant Swap**
  Have your houseplants grown like crazy this year and need a trim or did you divide some perennials and have extras? Bring your plants to the Plant Swap hosted by the Butler County Master Gardeners. The rules are simple: 1) Bring at least one plant, cutting or seeds to trade or sell, 2) All swaps must be labeled with plant name, 3) All plants must be pest and disease free. This event is free to attend, just bring your favorite plants to share with plant lovers in your community!!! Register so we can have enough tables: https://forms.gle/ddB6As2f53Cf9PZa9

- **November 1st at Noon - Plants Gone Wild! Controlling Invasive Plants**
  Given the opportunity, certain plants can take over your landscape, woodlands, and pastures. Join Lynn Loughary, Wyandotte County Extension Horticulture Agent, as she helps you to recognize which plants you need to keep a close eye on. Learn about a few of our most invasive plants, and management strategies for their control. Discover which weeds are also regulated by law, through Kansas’s noxious weeds program. This class is offered online via Zoom. For more information on the Garden Hour series or to register visit here: https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/

Don’t miss an issue. Sign up to receive the Grapevine directly to your email- https://forms.gle/qQJo4fBFLET9pGSh7

To view previous issues, visit our website: https://www.butler.k-state.edu/horticulture/2023_grapevine/untitled.html

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