



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA EXTENSION



NEWS & EVENTS

Free Appointments for filing Taxes are Available

Have you ever heard the saying “there is nothing in life free”? However, this is not true in all situations. Some people may not realize it, but you can file your taxes for free.

Based on data from the IRS, many taxpayers who claim the earned income tax credit (EITC) pay someone to prepare their tax returns. In 2013, The National Consumer Law Center estimated that taxpayers claiming the EITC paid about \$2.3 billion per year to get their taxes prepared and receive their refund fast. VITA is a free program that allows you to get your taxes prepared and filed for free. The program is coordinated locally by volunteers from one or more community-based organizations. Volunteers are certified by the IRS and must pass annual exams to prepare tax returns, and all tax returns go through a quality review process before being submitted to the IRS. VITA volunteer tax preparers are trained and certified by the IRS to prepare many types of tax returns, including those claiming the EITC and additional child tax credit (CTC).

The Elbert County Extension office will offer VITA tax preparation from February 1 – April 1, 2024. For more information or to schedule a free appointment to complete your taxes, please call Christa Campbell, your local county Extension agent, at (706) 283-2037.

Appointments are available on the following dates and additional dates are available in March.

February 1, 2024	February 8, 2024	February 19, 2024	February 23, 2024	February 29, 2024
February 5, 2024	February 14, 2024	February 21, 2024	February 26, 2024	March 4, 2024
February 7, 2024	February 15, 2024	February 22, 2023	February 28, 2024	March 6, 2024

How Do Rural Families Build Strength in Kids?

Do you want to participate in a study on the strength of rural families and communities? If you have a child between 6.5-8 years old, you are invited to participate in the Building Resilience and Nurturing Children's Health (BRANCH) Study!

Compensation for completing all parts of the study is up to \$390. (paid on a ClinCard prepaid Visa debit card).

Purpose:

Building Resilience and Nurturing Children's Health (BRANCH) is a study that aims to work with rural families to understand how families and communities promote strength and resilience to protect their youth from the ways in which stress influences behavioral risk for addictive behaviors, such as substance use.

- ◆ Part 1: Home visit where participants (legal guardian and child) play games together and take surveys (1.5hr) and a visit to UGA for a 37min MRI scan and surveys (2hr total visit). Participants will be asked for a saliva sample, to wear a sleep tracking watch, and to track mood daily on an app. (1-2 min)
- ◆ Part 2: 18 months after Stage 1, a follow-up MRI scan and surveys (2hr total visit).
- ◆ Part 3: 18 months after Stage 2, both participants will take an online survey (1hr) to wrap up.



Legal guardian will be asked for permission to contact child's teacher for a brief survey about the child's school and peer relationships.

AG & NATURAL RESOURCES

New Year Means the New Growing Season will be here soon!

Brian Bradford , Elbert County ANR Agent

Happy New Year! As 2024 kicks off and get started, many gardeners and plant enthusiasts are gearing up and thinking about the upcoming growing season and the promise of a bountiful harvest. Whether you're a seasoned gardener or a beginner, the New Year is the perfect time to think about and prep for the upcoming season. Before you dig in and start your plans, it's a good idea to reflect on past seasons, what worked and may not have worked so well, and the most significant obstacles you faced. How might you overcome those challenges in the New Year? What do you hope to achieve with your garden this year? Whether it's enhancing curb appeal, growing your own vegetables, creating a haven for pollinators, or simply enjoying a more colorful landscape, clearly define your goals. Setting specific objectives will guide your plant choices and gardening activities. Another preparation is to develop a planting calendar tailored to your local climate and growing zone. Research the optimal times for planting different types of plants, considering frost dates, temperature fluctuations, and seasonal changes. This strategic approach allows you to create a garden that remains in a constant state of bloom and productivity. Healthy soil is the foundation for a thriving garden; conduct a soil test to assess its composition and nutrient levels. Based on the soil test results, amend your soil with nutrients and organic matter such as compost or well-rotted manure. Healthy soil provides the necessary nutrients and structure for plants to flourish. Here are a few tips to think of for the upcoming season.

1. Planning is an essential step in the gardening process. January is the ideal time to plan for the upcoming growing season and reflect on the last year. What worked? What didn't? What kind of plants and vegetables do you want to grow? Garden catalogs and magazines will become your best friends during this month. Browse through them to find new or better plants to try out this year. It's best to go ahead and order seeds.
2. Equipment maintenance is another great task you can do during January. Clean, repair, and sharpen mower blades, pruning tools, and spray equipment so they will be in excellent working condition when it is time to use them.
3. Cleaning your garden and landscape is very important this time of year. Keeping your landscape tidy helps prevent diseases. Be sure to pick up fallen fruit from under trees, rake or blow leaves out of landscape beds, and remove all dead or broken tree limbs.
4. If you notice weeds are beginning to appear in your lawn, it's time to treat them with a properly selected post-emergence spray.

Gardening is a journey of continuous learning. Dedicate time to expand your horticultural knowledge through books, online resources (planting calendar https://secure.caes.uga.edu/extension/publications/files/pdf/C%20943_8.PDF), and local gardening events. Stay informed about new gardening techniques, plant varieties, and sustainable practices. This allows you to evolve as a knowledgeable and skilled gardener. Remember, the University of Georgia Extension Service has offices in every county and staff to assist you in becoming a successful gardener. Visit your local Extension office to see what resources are available to you. I genuinely believe that with thoughtful planning, sustainable practices, and a spirit of continuous learning, you'll cultivate a garden that thrives in the New Year and brings joy and fulfillment every season. Happy gardening!

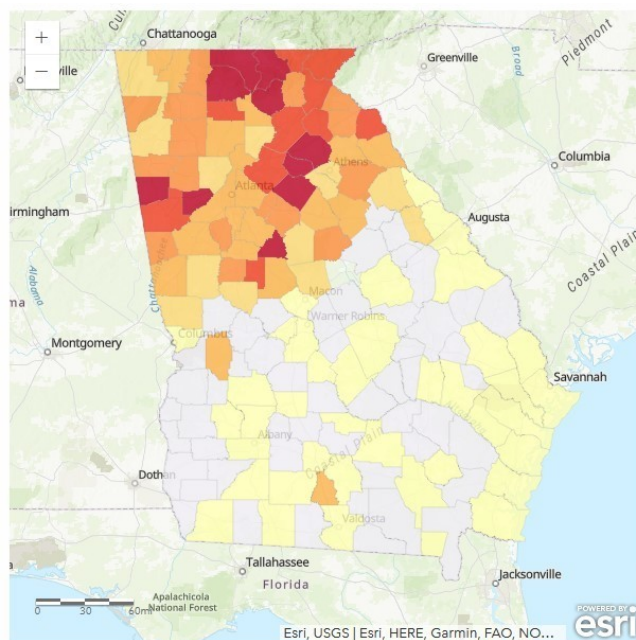
FAMILY & CONSUMER SCIENCES

Protect your Loved Ones & Pets from Hazards in your Home Christa Campbell, Elbert County FACS Agent

Many different contaminants are found inside your home, but there are steps you can take to reduce exposure and protect your loved ones from these indoor hazards. Start by learning more about two invisible gases – carbon monoxide (CO) and radon – that are harmful to people and pets.

Carbon monoxide (CO) gas comes from the incomplete burning of materials that contain carbon, such as kerosene, natural gas, propane, or wood. Each year at least 420 people die from accidental CO poisoning and over 100,000 people visit the emergency department. A common source of exposure in the winter is from unvented kerosene or propane heaters. The best ways to eliminate CO gas indoors is to keep fuel-burning devices maintained, don't use unvented kerosene or propane heaters, and don't leave cars idling in the garage. To protect your loved ones, you should also install CO alarms near every sleeping area.

Radon is a radioactive gas that is the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers and the second leading cause of lung cancer overall, claiming more than 21,000 lives annually. Radon gas is formed naturally when uranium in rock, soil and groundwater breaks down. Most of the time, it harmlessly dissipates into the atmosphere outdoors; however, when radon seeps into your home through cracks and crevices it becomes a problem. The only way to know the level of radon in your home is to test. The EPA action level is 4 picocuries per liter (pCi/L), which is the equivalent of smoking 8 cigarettes a day or receiving 200 chest X-rays per year. In addition to the people inside your home, radon can play a role in the development of cancer in dogs and cats that spend time indoors.



Radon is an indoor air problem that can be fixed, so don't delay and test today. You can order a radon test kit from UGA Extension (radon.uga.edu). The kit is hung in the lowest livable level of your home for 3 to 7 days then mailed off for analysis. If the test results are above 4 pCi/L, then you can either test again or consult a radon professional about installing a radon mitigation system. The EPA has a Consumer Guide to Radon Reduction publication that has information about mitigation. It can be found at: https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2016-02/documents/2013_consumers_guide_to_radon_reduction.pdf There is also a helpful publication about Radon Mitigation Dos & Don'ts that can be found on our website— https://secure.caes.uga.edu/extension/publications/files/pdf/C%201065_4.PDF

Visit radon.uga.edu to see an interactive map of radon levels in Georgia. For more information you may visit the websites or contact Christa Campbell, at the Elbert County Extension office.

You can eliminate these dangerous gases, so do not delay, protect the people and pets you love!

4-H & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

“Earthies” Science Club

6TH GRADE ONLY. If you love earth science, then this activity is for you! Join us after school in the Clover Room as we expand on our knowledge of earth science in fun, engaging activities. We will meet again on **Thursday, January 11th**. A ride must pick you up at 5:00pm at the ECMS auditorium and you must be a 6th grade student to attend.

ELEVATE Afterschool Club

Spend your afternoon with us learning a variety of topics, completing projects, and enjoying fun activities! You are sure to love this engaging and interactive time in the 4-H Clover Room (ECMS auditorium lobby) and BEYOND! Meetings are held monthly afterschool until 5:00pm. The next meeting is **Monday, January 29th**.

Modified Trap Shotgun Team

6th-12th GRADES Only! Students at Elbert County Middle School and Elbert County Comprehensive High School are eligible to shoot on the Modified Trap Shotgun Team with Elbert County 4-H. Practices are generally held on Sunday afternoons. Students who are interested in participating should make plans to attend an Orientation Meeting on **Monday, January 22nd**, at 6:00pm, in the Clover Room at ECMS, with an adult.

Young Riders Horse Club

If you like horses, make plans to join the Young Riders Horse Club! This afterschool club will meet once a month to learn & have fun! You do NOT have to own or ride a horse to participate in this Club! Meetings are held in the Clover Room at the ECMS (auditorium lobby), after school until 5:00pm. Our next meeting is **Monday, January 22nd**.

Youth Mental Health First Aid Training

Elbert County 4-H will offer a “Youth Mental Health First Aid Training” on Tuesday, January 30, 2024. Youth Mental Health First Aid teaches you how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders in youth. This 8-hour training gives adults who work with youth the skills they need to reach out and provide initial support to children and adolescents (ages 6-18) who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem and help connect them to the appropriate care. The course introduces common mental health challenges for youth, reviews typical adolescent development, and teaches a 5-step action plan for how to help young people in both crisis and non-crisis situations. Topics covered include anxiety, depression, substance use, disorders in which psychosis may occur, disruptive behavior disorders (including ADHD), and eating disorders. Adults who should consider participating include: teachers, school staff, coaches, camp counselors, youth group leaders, parents and people who work with youth in any capacity. This course is offered in a blended format; there will be two hours of online pre-work before a six hour in-person training. Youth Mental Health First Aid is offered at no charge through the USDA Rural Health & Safety Grant. Registration should be complete by January 24.

To register, call the Elbert County Extension Office at 706-283-2037 or email LMDYE@UGA.EDU.



**Mental Health
FIRST AID**

from NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR
MENTAL WELLBEING

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Closed 12:00pm-1:00pm

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www.ugaextension.org/elbert

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