

Upcoming Geary County Extension Programs
 Requires pre-registration. Call 238-4161 to pre-register

March

- 14 — Walk Kansas Program begins; pre-ordered T-Shirts can be picked up at the Extension office from 4:30—6:30 PM
- 22 — Regional 4-H Day—8:00 AM; Clay Center Community High School
- **27 — Cut the Clutter—6:30 PM; Dorothy Bramlage Library Classroom; free program designed to help you reduce the “clutter” that accumulates in your home or at work
- 29 — Geary County 4-H/Sr. Citizens Center Building Fund Raiser, 1025 S. Spring Valley Rd., Junction City, KS. Doors open at 5:00 PM, Silent Auction and Raffle, Dinner served 6:00—7:00 PM with Live Auction following dinner.

April

- 3 — Cooking Class—4:00 PM; Geary County Health Dept; contact Susie Bilderback, Geary County Family Nutrition Program (FNP) Program Assistant at sbilderb@ksu.edu; contact the Geary County Health Dept. to pre-register for this free program
- **22 — Foods Judging Workshop—5:30 PM; Geary County 4-H/Sr. Citizens Center, 1025 S. Spring Valley Rd., Junction City, KS. Designed for those interested in learning how to judge food entries at county fairs OR how to prepare food that will be judged. Registration fee: \$3.00. Light meal provided. Contact the Extension office for more details.

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Geary County Office information: <http://www.geary.ksu.edu/>

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Ask the Agent

From Terry: **Q**—My pressure canner cooks dry when I am processing. What is causing that?

A—There could be a couple of reasons:

1) Perhaps you are not putting enough water in the pressure canner to begin with. When you are processing fruits or vegetables, you should put about 3” of water in the canner before you put your jars in. When you are processing meats, add a little more water—at least 4” in the canner before you put your jars in. The reason you need more water in the pressure canner for meats is because of the increased length of processing time meats take versus the amount of time needed for fruits and vegetables. The longer the processing time, the more water you need.

2) Perhaps your gasket is nicked, cracked, or worn—causing the steam to leak out during pressurization. Gaskets from older canners may benefit from being treated with a light coat of vegetable oil once a year. Newer canners have gaskets that have been pre-treated and do not need treated. Make sure you are following the manufacturer’s recommendations regarding gasket care. The K-State Rapid Response website offers a variety of information about food preservation including links for replacement canner parts: <http://www.rrc.ksu.edu/>

Mark your calendar! On Friday, June 13, 2014 Geary County Extension is hosting an all-day food preservation workshop. We will cover basic and advanced food preservation skills.

Spring Into Action in March

It’s hard to believe with the winter we have had that the Spring season begins this month. It seems I am still trying to find storage space for my left-over Christmas decorations and the Valentine’s cards my kids insist they have to keep from their classmates!

As the days get longer and warmer, our bodies are eager to get more active and spend some time outside and our houses are waiting for the season spring cleaning and “airing out.”

Here are a few suggested tasks that you can do as part of your spring cleaning efforts:

OUTSIDE

- 1) Check the crawl space under your home for signs of mold or water. If found, eliminate the source.
- 2) Check the gutters, signing, and trim for loose pieces and repair as needed.
- 3) Check the screens on your windows to ensure they are all securely in place. Replace or repair as needed.
- 4) Trim branches from trees that overhang the house if you were unable to get to this task before winter.
- 5) Check the roof of your home to determine what repairs are needed, if any.

INSIDE

- 1) Vacuum or dust refrigerator and freezer coils.
- 2) Clean or replace filters in heating and air conditioning system.
- 3) Repair or replace leaky faucets.
- 4) Change batteries in the carbon monoxide and smoke detectors.
- 5) Review your home safety practices such as an evacuation plan in case of fire or tornado.

These represent just a few of the tasks that might be part of your spring cleaning checklist. Consider the unique needs of your own home, create a list of what needs to be accomplished, and spread the tasks out over several weekends.



CUT THE CLUTTER CLASS—MARCH 27
6:30 PM—Dorothy Bramlage Public Library Classroom

Tax season is well underway and that means many of us are looking through files and folders trying to make sure we have everything in order for filing taxes by April 15. Weeding through the papers, magazines, and junk mail that tends to accumulate all too quickly can be a challenge. The clutter that accumulates in our homes can be overwhelming!

This class offers participants the opportunity to learn simple home organization strategies that will reduce clutter. We will look at sources of clutter and learn how to apply quick sorting techniques that can prevent the accumulation of clutter in our home. Call the Geary County Extension office at 238-4161 by March 24 to register. Pre-registration is required to ensure there are enough materials for everyone. The program is free to the public.



Balancing Activities with Family Time

Part 1 of a 2-part Series

Although school and community activities are many, reclaiming family time can strengthen the family as a unit and add value to family life and any extras parents and children may choose. Making choices is key, if parents and children are overcommitted to a seemingly endless line of activities, the family—and each of its members—will suffer from the stress. Exhaustion isn't conducive to learning. Neither is having a mother or father who is frazzled from running children back and forth from one activity to another. The following are tips for reclaiming family time and balancing school, family, work and community:

Declare one night (at least) a week family night. Make it a pizza, movie or game night, or a time to cook together, do a project, play a pick-up game, go for a walk or ride bikes. Relax, and be flexible.

Encourage children to bring their friends home, stay for supper or join a family activity. While a child can be happy to have a friend included, his or her family also can get better acquainted with the child's friends.

Share family responsibilities. Get the children involved in sorting laundry, setting the table, cooking, cleaning or yard work to free up time for the family. Accept that a child might not complete the task as you would. Remember that learning to work as a team and accepting responsibility is a valuable lesson in life and likely to be more important than a perfect fold on towels or T-shirts.

Consider a child's age and interests, rather than your own, before choosing an activity. Feeling that you missed an opportunity, such as piano lessons or a chance to play in the band, is not a reason to assume that your child will embrace it.

Source: Tips For Parents Series, by Dr. Charlotte Shoup, K-State Research and Extension Specialist
<http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/Families/p.aspx?tabid=118>



Selecting A Tax Preparer

April 15th is right around the corner and that means tax returns are due soon. The money you earn and the related taxes you pay on your income deserve professional care. If you are one of the many people who hire a professional to file your tax return, here are some IRS tips to keep in mind when selecting a tax preparer:

- ⇒ Check their qualifications. Those who are paid to prepare taxes are required to have a PTIN (Preparer Tax Identification Number.) Ask if they have a PTIN and what professional organization they belong that supports continuing education classes.
- ⇒ Check their history. Find out through the Better Business Bureau if the preparer has a questionable history in preparing taxes.
- ⇒ Ask what they charge for tax preparation. The IRS recommends that you avoid preparers that base their fee on a percentage of your refund or those who promise larger refund than other can.
- ⇒ Ask to e-file your return. You first need to make sure your preparer offers IRSs e-file. This is a safe and secure way to file tax returns. Request any refund you have to be directly deposited into your back account.

- ⇒ Provide preparers with all the relevant tax documents. Good tax preparers will ask you questions to determine your total income, tax credits, deductions and other important information. Don't use a preparer that is willing to e-file based on your last past stub instead of your W-2 form. To do so is against the rules IRS has for e-filing.
- ⇒ Do not sign a return form before it is completely filled out.
- ⇒ Closely look through your tax return before you sign it. Ask questions if something is unclear.
- ⇒ As required by law, be sure the preparer signs the return and includes their PTIN.
- ⇒ Make sure your tax preparer is available after the return is filed. If questions or concerns arise from your filing, you want to be able to discuss them with the preparer.
- ⇒ Report abusive tax preparers to the IRS. You can report abusive tax preparers and suspected tax fraud to the IRS. You can access reporting forms at IRS.gov or by calling 800-TAX-FORM (800-829-3676).



Healthy Habits

A Clean & Sanitized Kitchen is a Safe Kitchen

This time of year begins the season where harmful bacteria can become more prevalent due to the warmer and more moist environment. A clean and dry kitchen helps fight bacteria to protect you and your family from foodborne illness. The most common germs known to cause illness include Salmonella, Campylobacter, and Norovirus*. The key to maintain a food-safe kitchen is a two-step process:

- The first step is to **clean** kitchen surfaces. Cleaning means that you are removing dirt and/or food particles from food preparation surfaces. Wash all surfaces with soap and warm water. Rinse the surface with clean water and let it air dry or use a clean paper towel.
- The second step is to **sanitize**. Sanitizing means that you are reducing germs to a safe level to reduce the risk of illness. Sanitize surfaces with diluted chlorine bleach (1 tsp. bleach mixed with

1 quart water) poured into a spray bottle. Do not use fragranced bleach as it is not food-safe. Spray the kitchen surfaces, refrigerator interior, and faucets with solution. Let the solution sit for 1 minute then wipe dry with a clean paper towel. Another option is to use undiluted white distilled vinegar. Warm a cup of the vinegar in a microwave safe container to 130°F then use a funnel to pour warmed vinegar into a spray bottle. Spray the warmed vinegar onto surfaces and let sit for 1 minute. Wipe dry with a clean paper towel.

Cleaning and sanitizing your kitchen surfaces should be part of routine cleaning and include counters, cutting boards, dishes, knives, utensils, pots and pans, and refrigerator surfaces (outside and inside.) It is best to follow these steps before AND after use.

* Norovirus has been in the news the past few months as the cause of many of the illnesses people experienced on various cruise ships.

Connecting with Kids

Spring Break Boredom Busters

Children look forward to spring break each year, but it seems their enthusiasm wanes by the second or third day. When that happens, we often hear "I'm bored!" What can you do to make spring break more enjoyable for everyone?

Here's just one idea: Make it "recycle" week and find ways to recycle unwanted items and/or take items to the nearest recycle center. Collect papers, magazines, old clothes, glass jars, and other recyclable items. Have the kids help sort items before you take everything to the nearest recycling center. If you have aluminum cans, turn them in for a bit of small change for the kids. Next, partner with them to make a bird feeder.

You will need: a 1 or 2-liter plastic soda bottle with lid; a utility knife; straight twigs (or you can use a couple of wooden spoons); string or fishing line; bird seed. Cut a small hole about 1/4 up from the bottom

of the bottle (just large enough for a twig or wooden spoon handle to fit through.) Make another hole, about 1" big, directly across from the smaller hole. Move 3" up from the last hole you cut and cut another small hole. Turn the bottle around to make a hole about the size of a nickel. Slide wooden spoon handles or sturdy twigs through the small holes through the holes opposite of them. These will become the perches for the birds. Carefully pour in bird seed. Next, cut or drill a small hole in the lid of the soda bottle. Run a string or fishing line through the lid and make a loop in the end to hang the bird feeder. Tie a knot in the other end of the string so that it won't pull through the cap. Put the cap back on the soda bottle and hang the feeder! Other project ideas



can be found at:

<http://extension.psu.edu/plants/gardening/news/2013/little-sprouts-winter-projects>