



Happy Friday, Farm Friends!



Spring is creeping around the corner! The daffodils are starting to pop, and the [peepers are singing](#) from the pond. All of these signs of Spring bring great joy! But we must be patient -- there's still more than a month of winter left on the calendar.

As we get closer to Spring, it's time to get some farmstead clean-up done. We always try to get the margins of the fields cleared of low-hanging branches and dead trees before things green up. Jonny, Elise and Ray went out on Tuesday to tackle some of that work. We'll make Paula Bunyan out of Elise yet!



This is the time of year to remove [cedar rust balls](#) from the cedar trees. Unfortunately we haven't done this in a while, but it is crucial to remove these fruiting bodies to avoid cedar apple rust (fungus) on nearby apple trees and other plants in the Rosaceae family. These strange looking alien creatures need to be removed before they sporulate, sending their rust spores everywhere. The white object in the photo is a rust ball that has been sliced in half.



Learning Part 1: Grafting

On Tuesday we hosted a meeting of the [Stokes Extension Master Gardens Volunteer Association](#) and we talked about grafting tomatoes.

You've probably heard about grafting fruit trees or shrubs but what exactly is grafting tomatoes? Grafting is a great technique that allows you to attach the top of an heirloom (or other) tomato (the scion) to the root of a vigorous, disease-resistant plant (the rootstock). This method helps plants, especially heirlooms that are not bred to be resistant to disease, be healthier and more productive during the growing season.

We got into grafting several years ago when we found that we were losing up to 40% of our tomatoes to disease. When you lose that much of your crop, it really hurts! Ray attended a grafting workshop hosted by NC State way back in 2008 but we really didn't try it until around 2018.

It's pretty dramatic how much better grafted plants do in comparison with their ungrafted kin. Here's a picture from last year in one of our tunnels. The grafted tomato is on the right and the ungrafted one is on the left -- big difference!



On Tuesday, the Master Gardeners got a taste of what it's like to graft tomatoes. After a brief introduction to the process, folks got to grab their razor blades and perform surgery on their little German Johnson plants. Take a look at the fun!





At the end of the morning, folks took home their little tomato patients. Smiles all around!



We are considering hosting a grafting workshop here at the farm in late April, so stayed tuned! We will also offer a **Tomato Growing at Home** workshop on **Sunday, April 21st**, so be on the lookout for registration information shortly.

Learning Part 2: Wash-Pack Improvements

On Thursday, Elise, Ray and Cheryl drove 3+ hours one way!) to attend a workshop hosted by [Carolina Farm Stewardship Association](#) on building a functional wash-pack area. This has been something that we've been nibbling around the margins on for a few years now as we make do with our existing area at the Tobacco Barn. But it's really time to make some serious improvements and this workshop gave us the jumpstart we needed. It was held at a great farm down east in Mount Olive -- [Footprints in the Garden](#). They are doing some amazing work to increase access to quality, nutrient-dense foods to their rural community.



We really enjoyed learning from the Martin family alongside CFSA staff on how we can transform a prefabricated shed into a very nice area for washing and packing our veggies and fruit. Time well spent!



That's all we've got this week!

Before we close, we need to point out a special milestone -- Jonny Scoble celebrated his 7th PGF birthday on Tuesday! Thanks for all of your hard work through the years, Jonny!



Happy Presidents Day weekend! While you are out enjoying the Spring-ish weather, how about participating in the [Great Backyard Bird Count of](#)

[2024](#). This global event helps scientists better understand and protect birds around the world. Let's help out!

Until next week,
Cheryl & Ray

