The Dreaded Black Thumb

The dreaded black thumb! It is a curse that many claim and none believe can be fixed. It quietly stalks its prey like a panther sneaking up and striking with deadly precision. It starts with good intentions and ends with a withered pile of distress. Are you the owner of a black thumb? Symptoms may include: sogginess, dehydration, forgetfulness, insect infestations, fungicidal takeovers, and/or disease outbreaks. This condition can be reversed over time with proper educational and technical assistance.

Everyone suffers from this deadly condition at one time or another. Like many others, my black thumb is usually the result of good intentions forgotten. As I sit here writing this column, my zucchini plants are covered with squash bugs and have blossoms that have not been pollinated. I forgot to pinch the suckers on my tomato plants, and their blossoms are falling off because I cannot, for the life of me, remember to water before I dash off to work in the morning. So, what do you do when the black thumb falls upon your vegetable garden? Who do you rely on?

In 2008, the value of fruit and vegetable production in Robeson County was estimated at $7,713,270. Robeson County was also ranked number one in North Carolina for Wheat and Soybean production with a combined value of over $50,000,000. No, those numbers are not typos. So, when your thumb turns black, there is always someone else right here in our county that can fill the gap for you.

Gardening is not always about knowing how to do things yourself. Sometimes smart gardening is knowing when to leave it to the professionals in the county and support the local producers. The Robeson County Farmers Market located on the corner of Eighth and Elm Streets in downtown Lumberton is a great place to start locally. When I have a particular distressing view of tomatoes with blossom end rot in my garden or when my zucchini plants become devastated by the diseases that the squash bug spread, I know that every Wednesday and Saturday from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. I can visit the market for all my fruit and vegetable needs. From blueberries to honey, all the products sold at the market are certified locally grown within the County.

The curse of the black thumb is not only a good reason to buy local, but it is a great opportunity to get to know your local producers. Having a face and name to put with your food is a powerful thing. The Robeson County Farmers Market is having their annual Spring Harvest Extravaganza...
on Saturday, June 26 from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. Come out to the market, win free prizes, taste test great food, and get to know the people who work hard to provide for you.

The Robeson County Cooperative Extension is also hosting the first annual “Country Comes to Town” at the Robeson Regional Agricultural Fairgrounds on Saturday, July 24 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The day will include interactive sessions about vegetables, livestock, field crops, farm equipment, and food safety led by farmers and producers from here in the County. Families and friends are encouraged to come enjoy a fun day of learning together how our food moves from the farm to the fork. A $5 preregistration fee includes lunch, a t-shirt, and participation in the interactive sessions. Local vendors will be present for all to enjoy!

Robeson County is one of the leading agricultural counties in the state. It makes sense to buy local. Buying locally not only supports our neighborhood economy, but it creates a relationship between you and the farmer. So, when my forgetfulness causes my thumb to turn black, I know that I can confidently purchase what I need directly from a farm within the county.

If you have questions, comments, or ideas about buying local, or would like to preregister for July 24, please contact me, Kerrie Roach, horticultural Extension agent, at North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, at (910) 671-3276 or by E-mail at Kerrie_Roach@ncsu.edu, or visit North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center’s website at Robeson.ces.ncsu.edu.

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