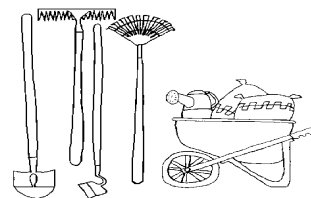


IN THE GARDEN NOW

HELPING GARDENERS PUT KNOWLEDGE TO WORK



JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2013

Lisa Rayburn

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FUNGUS GNATS ARE AMONG US

Midwinter is a common time to notice fungus gnats. These little insects are so small they can be difficult to see but you may notice them flying up from your houseplants or resting on the leaves.

Adult fungus gnats are tiny, dark insects that resemble mosquitoes but are smaller – in the range of 1/16 to 1/8 inch long. Fungus gnats are not strong fliers so they tend to remain near potted plants and can frequently be found walking on the surface of the soil. While fungus gnats can occur anytime of year and are common outside, they are often noticed when houseplants have been brought back in after spending the summer outdoors.

Once established, the larvae of fungus gnats are found in the potting mix, feeding on the plant roots. The adults consume very little devoting most of their energy to mating and laying eggs.

The best way to control fungus gnats in houseplants is to modify the habitat to remove their breeding grounds. Fungus gnats require moist, organic soil so be careful to avoid overwatering your plants. The surface of the soil should dry out to the touch and the container should feel light for its size before watering. Do not allow any water to stand in saucers or decorative outer pots. Avoid using incompletely composted organic matter in potting soil and remove dropped leaves, flowers and other plant debris as they fall on the surface of the potting mix.

There are several other control options available as well but they tend to be hard to find. The use of beneficial nematodes and the bacteria *Bacillus thuringiensis* subspecies *israelensis* (Bti) can help control fungus gnats. However, these options can be hard for homeowners to find. While adult fungus gnats can be controlled with an application of pyrethrin or pyrethroid based insecticides, this does not eliminate the larvae in the soil and will not effectively break the lifecycle of the pest.

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KEEPING HOLIDAY PLANTS HAPPY IN THE NEW YEAR

Many people enjoy the seasonal plants that we associate with Christmas – poinsettia, Christmas cactus and amaryllis – even after the holiday season has passed. With a little attention, these plants can be attractive for several months or even in subsequent seasons.

All three of these plants grow best in a brightly lit, warm (60 to 75 degree) area away from cold or dry drafts. Rotate pots a quart turn every couple of days to keep plants from bending towards the source of light. Like most houseplants, be careful not to overwater poinsettia, Christmas cactus or amaryllis. If these plants are kept too wet, the roots will rot. Water plants only when the surface of the soil feels dry to the touch and the container feels light when lifted.

Water plants in the sink with room temperature water. Remove pots from their saucers or foil wrappers before watering and water until it begins to drain out the bottom of the pot. Allow the plant to drain for several minutes before returning it to its saucer or wrapping and its normal location. Don't allow water to stand in saucers or foil wrappers between waterings. If your water is fluoridated, allow it to stand overnight before using it to water your plants. Also, don't use water treated by a water softener because it contains sodium which can harm plant roots.

Some plants keep better from one year to the next than others. Poinsettia rarely look as nice in their second season as they did their first. For most people, it makes more sense to compost poinsettias when they start to look ragged and buy new ones next Christmas. On the other hand, Christmas cactus and amaryllis often get better year after year. When your Christmas cactus finishes blooming, pinch a few segments off the end of each branch to encourage plants to stay full and lush instead of becoming leggy. The pinched segments can be easily rooted by sticking them in potting mix. As temperatures warm, feed your Christmas cactus with a pelleted slow release fertilizer or fertilize twice a month with a liquid formulation such as MiracleGro. Once danger of frost has passed in the spring, you can move the Christmas cactus outdoors

to a partially shaded location. Bring your cactus back indoors in October before the first threat of frost. Your cactus will begin to form buds as the day length shortens and should bloom again next Christmas.

Amaryllis grow well outside in our area. Keep your spent bulbs indoors until the spring; once the danger of frost has passed, plant bulbs in the landscape. Select a sunny to partially shaded site with well-drained soil. Your bulb probably will not bloom the first season it is in the ground but should return to its normal blooming cycle and flower the following spring after being planted out. When planted outdoors, amaryllis bloom in the spring rather than in the winter. The bulbs are easy to grow, resistant to deer and voles and will gradually increase in size and number over time.

PLANTING WINTER'S FIRST CROPS

~Charlotte Glen, Pender County

As food prices increase many families are looking to their own backyards as a source of fresh, healthy, locally grown vegetables. Irish potatoes and garden peas are two of the earliest crops gardeners can plant outside. Both are easy to grow, highly productive, and favorites of both kids and adults at the dinner table.



Plant garden peas, snow peas, and sugar snaps in January to harvest in April and May.

More Peas, Please!

Garden peas, and their relatives, snow peas and sugar snaps, are simple and productive crops that almost anyone can grow. Peas grow best in sunny areas with well drained soil that is not too acidic, ideally with a soil pH of 6.0 to 6.5. In coastal areas, peas can be planted outside as early as mid January. Even away from the coast peas should be planted by mid February at the latest so they have enough time to mature before hot weather sets in. Garden and snow peas that develop under temperatures above 80° will be starchy and tough.

Soaking pea seeds in a jar of water for six to eight hours immediately before planting will help them germinate faster but is not absolutely necessary. Seeds may also be treated with *Rhizobium* inoculant, a natural bacterium that helps peas and other legumes convert nitrogen from the air into a form plants can use. If you are planting peas in an area where peas or beans have not been grown before, treating pea seeds with inoculant before planting may improve growth.

To apply inoculant simply pour some into a bag, add the presoaked seeds and shake until the peas are coated. Immediately plant treated seed in the garden. Sow seeds an inch deep and one to two inches apart. Water well after sowing and keep moist until seedlings begin to emerge, usually within seven to ten days. Be sure to provide a low trellis such as pea fencing or a latticework of twiggy branches for the vines to climb upon.

Fresh peas will be ready to harvest 65 to 80 days after planting. When the pea pods swell they are ready to be picked. Peas are of the best quality when they are fully expanded but immature, before they become hard and starchy. Peas should be picked immediately before cooking because their quality and sweetness deteriorates rapidly. High fertility will cause excessive vine growth and poor yields so be conservative with fertilizer applications.

Pass the Potatoes! One of my favorite crops to grow in the spring garden is potatoes. No matter what your age, nothing is more fun than digging potatoes from the soil – it's like a tiny treasure hunt! And the taste of home grown potatoes is outstanding.

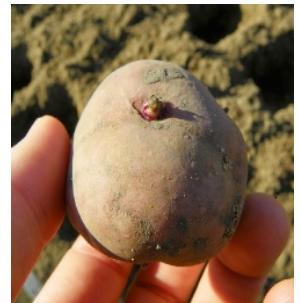
Potatoes planted in early February will be ready to harvest in May and June. For best results, plant only certified seed potatoes, which can be purchased from garden centers this time of year. Certified seed potatoes are small potatoes that have been grown under special conditions to ensure they are free of diseases and usually give better results than potatoes purchased from the grocery store.

Potatoes need to be planted in well drained soil. Wet soils often result in disease problems and crop failure. To yield well, potatoes require consistent

moisture and prefer rich soils that have been well amended with organic matter such as rotted horse manure or compost, and have a soil pH around of 5.5 to 6.0.

Potato varieties that do well in our area include 'Yukon Gold', a personal favorite, 'Kennebec', and 'Red Pontiac'. Cut seed potatoes into pieces that are each about the size of an egg and contain at least one sprout, known as an 'eye'. Cut pieces can be planted immediately or sprouted indoors for a few weeks by placing them in a warm, sunny location.

When cutting seed potatoes into sections, make sure each piece includes at least one sprout, known as an 'eye'. Red skin potatoes will have pink eyes, while yellow skin potatoes will have green eyes.



In the garden, plant seed pieces 6" deep and 10" apart in the row, with 3' between rows. Keep in mind 12 pounds of seed potatoes can plant around a 100' row, and yield over 200 pounds of spuds. Once harvested potatoes can be stored in a cool, dry, dark place such as a garage or shed, where they will keep for three to four months or more.

TIPS AND TASKS

Prune back ornamental grasses and ground covers in early February before new growth starts. Add mulch to beds if needed.

Scale can be a problem on hollies and other shrubbery outside and on house plants indoors. Scale are small, hardbodied insects that often look like bumps on the bark or leaves of the plant. Scale on landscape plants can be treated with horticultural oils. Follow the label directions and use the spray rate recommended for the time of year. Acephate (Orthene), carbaryl or insecticidal soap can also be used. Insecticidal soap is a good choice for scale on houseplants. A second treatment after two weeks is generally needed to control newly emerged scale insects.

Plants naturally change color in the winter and even evergreens like azaleas, gardenias and camellias can experience yellowing. Older leaves naturally yellow and drop off. If azaleas are discolored and the leaves show stippling (tiny discolored spots), spider mites could be the culprit. Spider mites can be controlled with horticultural oil or insecticidal soap.

Dormant pruning of fruit trees and grapevines should be done in February as should heavy pruning and rejuvenation pruning of most ornamental shrubs. Remember to wait and prune spring flowering shrubs such as azaleas after they bloom.

If using a preemergent herbicide to control summer annual weeds (including crabgrass) in your lawn, aim to apply it around Valentine's Day. If these chemicals are applied too late, you will not get adequate weed control. Read and follow all label directions. Avoid weed-and-feed formulations and wait until mid-May to June to fertilize warm season lawns.

If you are battling florida betony, remember to apply herbicides in February before the plant starts developing its distinctive tubers.

Remove leaves and debris from lawns. Do not burn St. Augustine, centipede, or zoysiagrass lawns. Irrigation is usually not necessary during the winter months. The optimum time to seed or lay sod for a warm season lawn is in the spring from about April until July 1.

Plan your spring vegetable garden. Cool season crops need to be planted early enough to harvest before the heat of summer hits. Beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard greens, onion, garden peas, potatoes, radishes, spinach and turnips can all be planted in February for spring harvest.

with when should I do it, how much should I cut off, and where should I cut, being the most frequently asked. The answer to many of these questions depends on what type of shrub you are pruning and why you want to prune it. The tips below can help you determine when to prune your shrubs and how much to cut off.

Pruning Not Always the Answer

Not all shrubs need to be pruned on a regular basis. Many shrubs have a naturally compact habit, such as 'Wheeler's Dwarf' pittosporum, dwarf yaupon, dwarf nandina, and 'Carissa' holly. The only pruning these shrubs need is to remove an occasional stray shoot or broken branch. Other shrubs, such as privet, wax myrtle, abelia, and loropetalum, grow large rapidly. When planted in small landscapes gardeners may try to keep these plants compact by repeatedly pruning them, but in the end it is just a matter of having the wrong plant in the wrong place. If you have a shrub that constantly needs to be pruned because it is too vigorous for the site, your best long term option is to move it somewhere else and replace it with a shrub whose mature size fits the location. When shopping for new plants for your landscape, always ask how large a plant will grow and choose varieties that are in scale with your landscape space.

Pruning to Increase Flowers

Most of the pruning undertaken in late winter is done to increase flower production on summer blooming shrubs like butterfly bushes, beautyberry, Japanese spireas, and everblooming roses (Knock Out varieties, hybrid teas, floribundas, and grandifloras). Summer blooming shrubs produce flower buds on new growth that comes out in spring. Pruning them now encourages lots of new growth to develop and can result in lots of flowers. Some of these shrubs, particularly butterfly bushes and beautyberry, are often pruned back hard by cutting them down to around one foot above the ground. Knock Out roses should similarly be cut back to around 18" each year to promote vigorous healthy growth. This type of drastic pruning is okay for vigorous summer blooming shrubs. Less vigorous shrubs can be pruned by cutting the ends of the branches back by several inches. If they are too dense, remove some of the stems completely by cutting them out at ground level. Other summer flowering shrubs that can be pruned in spring

PRUNING ORNAMENTAL SHRUBS:

When, How and Why

Charlotte Glen, Horticulture Agent – Pender County

There are several reasons to prune shrubs – to promote flowering, to improve their shape, and to maintain their size, are some of the most common. Pruning is also a topic that raises many questions –

include oleander, which can be cut back to near ground level to remove cold damaged foliage if needed, rose of sharon, abelia, and summersweet (Clethra).

Shrubs that flower in the spring form their flower buds on the shoots and branches that grow each summer. Currently, those flower buds are swelling, just waiting for warmer temperatures to signal spring's arrival. If these shrubs are pruned now, all of the flower buds will be cut off, eliminating this spring's flowering. The time to prune spring flowering shrubs, like azaleas, flowering quince, yellow bells (Forsythia), and climbing roses, is immediately after they finish blooming. A general rule of thumb as to what is considered spring flowering is any shrub that blooms before Mother's Day – though there are a few exceptions. Oakleaf and common hydrangea, Indian hawthorn, and Virginia sweetspire are all shrubs that bloom on old wood, but generally flower after Mother's Day. Wait to prune these until after flowering.

Rejuvenating Overgrown Shrubs

Occasionally even an appropriately placed large shrub may need to be rejuvenated. Shrubs that have been neglected for years or have grown out of shape can be pruned back to within a few feet from the ground in late winter or early spring. When deciding how low to cut, remember that new growth is generally only going to occur within six inches to a foot of the pruning cut. Do not be afraid to cut plants back dramatically to avoid the appearance of a shrub on stilts. Healthy shrubs will grow back from this type of pruning with amazing vigor, but not all shrubs can be pruned this way. Shrubs that respond well to this treatment include camellias, hollies, privet, Formosa azaleas, and wax myrtle. Needled evergreens, such as junipers and arborvitae, should never be pruned this severely as they are unable to generate new growth buds on old wood.

Another method for dealing with large overgrown shrubs is to remove their lower branches back to their main trunks, shaping them into small, multi-stemmed trees. This type of pruning can be very successful for overgrown camellias, Japanese privet, wax myrtle, larger growing loropetalums, cleyera, and doublefile viburnum, and can be done at any time of the year.

CONSIDER A KOUSA DOGWOOD



'Greensleeves' – photo courtesy of Tom Ranney

Are you looking for an attractive tree to anchor a shrub border or make an early summer impact in the garden? If so, consider a Kousa dogwood. The Kousa Dogwood is a handsome small- to medium-sized tree reaching a mature height of 30 feet. Sometimes referred to as the Chinese Dogwood, this Asian cousin to our native flowering dogwood can be used as a specimen plant or in shrub borders. This plant was one of North Carolina's 2011 Showstopper Plants.

Depending on the age of the Kousa Dogwood, the trees take on a different appearance. Young trees grow in an upright fashion and in somewhat of a conical shape. As a Kousa matures it develops more horizontal branching and becomes more wide-spreading. Our native dogwoods bloom in April while the Kousa Dogwoods flower nearly a month later after the leaves have emerged. A tree for all seasons, the Kousa Dogwood has berries that resemble raspberry fruit in autumn, and the peeling bark on the mature tree trunks gives the bark an attractive mottled appearance.

A great addition to any Carolina landscape, grow in full sun or partial shade. The soil should be well-drained but moist. There are several named selections currently in the nursery trade, including 'Greensleeves', 'Satomi' and 'Blue Shadow.' Don't let this opportunity to transplant a real showstopper pass you by.

Hardiness Zones: 5 to 8

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DISPOSING OF YOUR CHRISTMAS TREE

If you have a chipper/shredder, your Christmas tree can become a part of your compost pile. If not, you will need to dispose of your Christmas tree appropriately. All yard waste, including real Christmas trees, is banned from North Carolina landfills. To facilitate disposal, the Onslow County Solid Waste Department is accepting real Christmas trees (lights and ornaments removed) at the following sites:

- Folkstone Convenience Center Site at 320 Old Folkstone Rd, Holly Ridge (Sneads Ferry area just down the street from the Food Lion). Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday from 8am - 5:30pm (\$1.00 per tree).
- Swansboro Convenience Center Site at 698 Swansboro Loop Rd, Swansboro. Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday from 8am - 5:30pm (\$1.00 per tree).
- Onslow County Landfill (Tree and Wood Pallet Recycle Area) \$49.00 per ton. Monday-Saturday from 6:30am – 5pm.

For more information, call 910.989.2107.

UPCOMING CLASSES

HELP Garden Class February 1 through June 28

Learn to grow vegetables for your own use or for sale. This intensive, hands-on training will lead you through the process from site selection, soil testing and crop scheduling through harvest, storage and marketing and everything in between. Cost for the entire class is \$75 and you get to take fresh produce home with you too! The class meets each Friday night from 5 to 7 pm. Call 910.455.5873 and ask for Larry Kent for more information.

Spring Vegetable Gardening Class February 23, 2 to 3:30 pm Harriotte B. Smith Library, Camp Lejeune

Learn all about growing a spring vegetable garden in Onslow County. We'll cover when, where and what to grow. Call 910-451-3026 to register.

RECIPE CORNER

For a refreshing midwinter treat, try this salad from tasteofhome.com. You could use pears and blue cheese in place of the apple and Parmesan for a change of pace.

Apple-Pecan Salad with Honey Vinaigrette Recipe

Ingredients

- 7 cups torn Bibb or Boston lettuce
- 1 medium apple, sliced
- 1/3 cup pecan halves, toasted
- 1/4 cup cider vinegar
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon honey mustard
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- 1 cup shredded Parmesan cheese

In a serving bowl, combine the lettuce, apple and pecans. In a small bowl, whisk the vinegar, honey, oil, mustard, salt and pepper. Pour over salad; toss to coat. Sprinkle with cheese. **Yield:** 10 servings.

Recommendations for the use of chemicals are included in this publication as a convenience to the reader. The use of brand names and any mention or listing of commercial products or services in this publication does not imply endorsement by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension nor discrimination against similar products or services not mentioned. Individuals who use chemicals are responsible for ensuring that the intended use complies with current regulations and conforms to the product label. Be sure to obtain current information about usage and examine a current product label before applying any chemical. For assistance, contact an agent of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension in your county.

The use of brand names in this publication does not imply endorsement of the products or services named or criticism of similar ones not mentioned

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CONTACT US

If you have questions about lawn, landscape or garden problems, contact your local Cooperative Extension office. In Onslow County call 455.5873, Mon – Fri, 8 am and 5 pm, or visit us online anytime at <http://onslow.ces.ncsu.edu>. While you are there, you can post your questions to be answered by email using the ‘Ask an Expert’ widget (in the upper left hand corner).



DO YOU WANT TO BECOME A MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER?

Onslow County Master Gardener Volunteer Class Starts January 31, 2013

The Onslow County Center of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension is offering a Master Gardener Volunteer class starting January 31. The Master Gardener Volunteer Program is a joint endeavor of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service and volunteers who wish to learn how to be better gardeners and help other gardeners by sharing their knowledge. The program is designed to recruit and train volunteers to help meet the educational needs of the citizens of Onslow County.

Class participants learn about a wide variety of gardening subjects including vegetables, fruits, lawn grasses, shrubs, flowers and trees. The training focuses on developing diagnostic skills for insects and diseases of plants. Classes are also given on landscaping for water quality, soils, composting, propagation, wildlife control and much, much more!

Master Gardeners receive 40 hours of training and after graduation they provide 40 hours of volunteer work in the community. Master Gardeners are involved in a range of community projects including: answering homeowner inquiries at the Extension Office and Farmer's Market, mailing out information bulletins to homeowners, conducting plant clinics, working with

school children on special horticultural projects, talking to garden clubs, working on community beautification projects and developing the new Discovery Gardens of Onslow.

The 2013 Master Gardener course will begin January 31 and end April 2. Classes normally will be taught Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9:00 am – Noon. Cost for the course is \$100, which includes a comprehensive Master Gardener Manual.

Persons interested in receiving an application for the 2013 course should call the North Carolina Cooperative Extension - Onslow County Center at (910) 455-5873, and request an application. Spots are limited.