

February 2015
Volume 6, Issue 2



Alamance Gardener

Alamance County Cooperative Extension Horticulture Department

Coming Events

Workshops and Demonstrations

Thurs., Feb 12, 10:00a DEMO

Grapevine Pruning

Wed., Feb 18, 1:00p DEMO

*Fruit Tree Pruning **

Thurs., Feb 26, 10:00a

Small Fruit - Blueberries and Brambles

Thurs., Mar. 12, 10:00a

Composting

Mon., Mar. 16

Deadline to order blueberry bushes from 4-H

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/?p=337276>

Thurs., Mar. 26, 10:00a

Pruning Trees and Shrubs

All classes will begin in the auditorium at the Agriculture Building and are free unless otherwise indicated.

Registration is required. Call 336-570-6740, or register online here:

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/?p=333280>

*Fruit Tree Pruning only:

<http://goo.gl/forms/KWZ1bEIeX1>

Contact us :

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A Fruitful Proposition



Fruit trees like apples and peaches can be a smart addition to your home landscape. They have attractive blossoms in the spring and if all goes well you will have some tasty fruit later in the summer. There is nothing better than a tree ripened peach or apple especially if it is picked out of your own backyard.

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Build a Home-Size Orchard

You may be concerned that you don't have enough space for fruit trees in your yard, but they can take up less area than you might expect. Peaches are self-fertile and do not require cross pollination so a single tree can be expected to bear fruit in the home garden. Apple trees need a pollinator, but two dwarf apple trees can fit in a fairly small area.



Room for 3 dwarf apples,
2 peaches and a fig

There is, however, some work involved in maintaining these fruit trees. Regular pruning is required to keep the trees fruitful and from getting too big. Pruning is not too difficult, but there are a few tips to remember. If you are interested in growing fruit trees we will give you those tips at our fruit tree pruning class on Wednesday, February 18 at 1 pm.

There is also the issue of pest management. Nobody particularly likes a worm in their apple or a rotten peach. You may get lucky and harvest good fruit without doing anything, but that is rare. Next month's edition will go into more detail about what is necessary to produce mostly pest free fruit.

Fruit trees require well-drained soil. If drainage is a concern, the trees can be planted in raised beds. They prefer a pH of 6.0-6.5. Most soils in North Carolina are acidic and should be limed before planting. Lime and nutrient recommendations can be obtained from a soil test. The recommended lime and fertilizer amendments should be incorporated into the soil to a depth of at least 12-18" before planting.

Full sun is required for good fruit production. Avoid planting fruit trees where they will be shaded by other trees, buildings, fence rows, etc. If a full sun location is not available, an area that receives morning sun is better than just afternoon sun. The morning sun is important to dry the dew from the leaves to help reduce disease problems.

Fruit trees can be purchased as bare root grafted trees. The trees should be unpacked as quickly as possible upon arrival. The roots should be soaked in water for several hours before planting. If the trees cannot be planted immediately, they should be temporarily planted in a well-drained soil. The planting hole should be large enough to fit all the roots without bending or cutting. Try to avoid cutting roots other than those that were damaged in shipping. Dig a hole 18" deep and twice as wide as the roots. The graft union should be at least 2" above the soil line after the soil has settled. It is important that the graft union is always above the soil line to prevent



scion rooting. Carefully fill the hole with soil trying to avoid twisting or bunching the roots. Trees purchased in containers should be planted in a similar manner. They should be carefully removed from the pot and any circling roots should be loosened or cut. Water the tree thoroughly after planting to settle the soil and fill in air pockets.

There are many varieties of peaches and apples that will do well in our area, but there are many that will not be happy here. It is important to do some research before planting to make sure you are getting the right tree in the right spot. The following publication has more information on home tree fruit production.

<http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/producing-tree-fruit-for-home-use/>



If you have any questions about fruit trees or any other gardening topic, please give me or Chris a call.



February Garden Tips

When spring bulbs begin to sprout this month, spread a balanced fertilizer, such as 10-10-10, around the new shoots to help fuel next year's flowers.

Draw up a layout for your vegetable garden, keeping in mind the sun's pattern and orient plants so that taller types don't shade out shorter. Try to rotate vegetable crops so that the same varieties are not growing in the same spots year after year. A five-year rotation is ideal to reduce plant-specific pest and disease populations, but, if that's not practical for you, a rotation of as little as three years would still be helpful.

Get started in the vegetable garden now by planting asparagus crowns. Select a male hybrid, such as Jersey Giant or Jersey Gem. Plant 1- or 2-year-old crowns, but wait until next year to begin a limited harvest.

Plant potatoes, broccoli and onion sets and seeds of carrots, cabbage, onions, peas, radishes, rutabagas, spinach and turnips.

You may fertilize trees and shrubs this month, if needed. In general, if trees and shrubs are growing at a rate that is acceptable to you and the foliage looks healthy, there is no need to fertilize.

This is a good time to plant fruit trees, blueberry and blackberry bushes and grapevines. If you're just getting started with growing your own fruit, blueberries are an excellent choice for beginners. Sit in on our Small Fruit class on February 26th, then be sure to order your blueberry plants from the 4-H sale, going on now through March 16th.

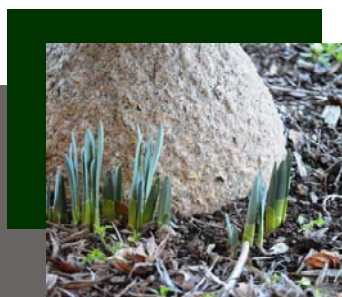
Grapes and large fruit trees should be pruned this month to enhance fruit production, remove unwanted growth and improve framework. Attend one of our free pruning demonstrations this month to learn the best way to improve your fruit yields. See page 1 for days and times.

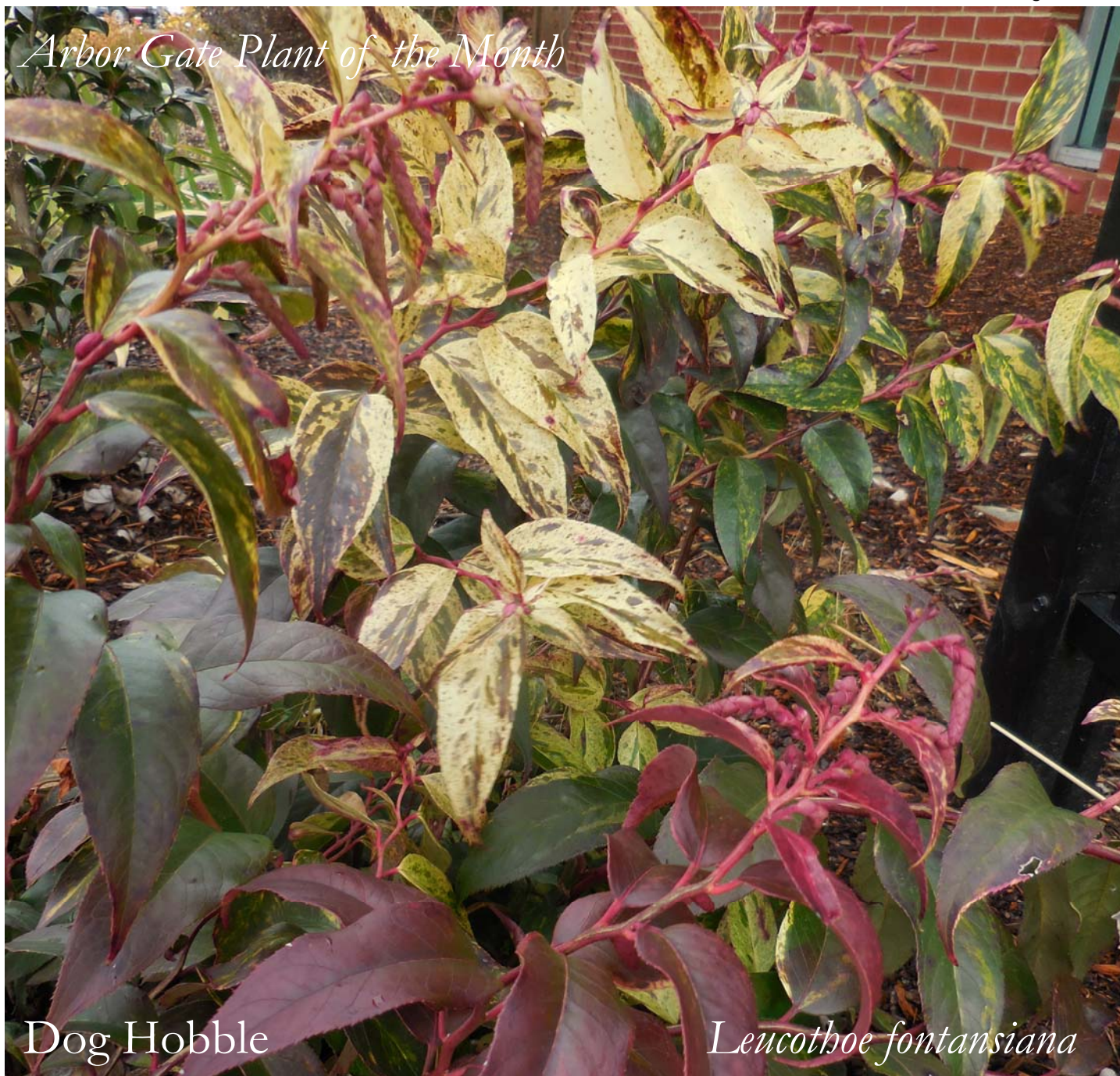
Spray wild onion, wild garlic and winter annual weeds in lawns with a broadleaf herbicide. Be sure to read the label on the product you use and follow the directions care-

fully. Keep in mind that most of these products work best when air temperature is between 50 and 80 degrees as that is when the weeds are actively growing and will take up the material.

You can divide perennials now as the tips emerge. Daylilies, Siberian iris, peonies, hostas, and shasta daisies are a few to divide and replant now.

Trim back ornamental grasses this month, before new growth begins. Pampas, Miscanthus, Pennisetum and other grasses will have a fresher look come spring if old foliage is cut to the ground now. Although not a grass, Liriodendron (also known as "Monkey Grass", ironically) should be cut back now, too. This is easily done with your lawn mower. Set the blade high and go!



Arbor Gate Plant of the Month**Dog Hobble***Leucothoe fontansiana*

How about a little color in the shade garden right about now? *Leucothoe fontansiana* 'Girard's Rainbow' could be just the thing!

This graceful Southeastern woodland native, so named for a growth habit that impedes even a good hound's progress on the chase, is a relative of *Pieris japonica*, and requires very similar care. Happiest in shade, planted in an acid, moist, well-drained organic soil, Dog Hobble grows slowly to a 3' tall by 5' wide mound. Evergreen foliage may turn a deep wine red in winter. The cultivar 'Girard's Rainbow' boasts emerging foliage in variegated shades of pink, white and copper. Red buds open to reveal creamy white bell-like flowers borne in axillary racemes along the stems, somewhat hidden by the foliage.

But, we love it for the foliage! A bright spark on a dull February day in the shade garden.

Read about *Leucothoe fontansiana* care here:

<http://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/all/leucothoe-fontanesiana/>

