May 2015
Volume 6, Issue 5

Alamance Gardener

Alamance County Cooperative Extension Horticulture Department

Coming Events

Workshops and Demonstrations

Thurs., May 7, 10:00a
Perennials with Carole Kawula of ACC
Thurs., May 21, 10:00a
Pollinator Gardening with Natives
Thurs., Jun. 4, 10:00a
Rainwater Catchment
Thurs., June 18, 10:00a
Birds in the Garden
Thurs., Jul 9, 10:00a
Preserving Your Bounty
Thurs., July 23, 10:00a
Fall Vegetable Gardening

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://alamance.ces.ncsu.edu/

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Totally Tomatoes!

Sometimes I do things that I know I shouldn't do. I won't confess to all my shortcomings in this article, but I will admit to one. At our last Think Green Thursdays class on tomatoes, I told the class that the first week of May is the best time to plant tomatoes in our area. I then had to admit that I had already planted my tomatoes the second weekend in April. The weather was nice and I figured if a frost got the tomatoes, I would help stimulate the local economy by buying more.

I knew that even though I planted my tomatoes three weeks early, they most likely won't bear fruit any earlier than those planted the first of May. The soil temperatures are too cold for good growth and the air temperatures are pretty cold too. I have had three nights since I planted where the temperature went below 40 degrees and one morning was 34 degrees with frost. Needless to say, many of my tomato plants look pitiful. Hopefully the warm weather we are having now will bring them around.

Uh-oh, Is that a Fungus Among Us?

Tomatoes are perhaps the most popular garden vegetable that people try to grow. The emphasis there is on the word "try". We get more questions about tomato growing problems than any other vegetable. When I first looked at the tomato disease book and saw the number of bacterial, fungal and virus problems tomatoes can get, I was amazed that anyone ever gets a ripe tomato. There are a number of different factors that can lead to tomato growing success or failure. We'll discuss these from the ground up.

Many people have a small garden spot and grow German Johnson tomatoes in the same place year after year. Over a period of time, soilborne diseases like Fusarium and Verticillium will build up in the soil and will cause the plants to wilt and die. Prolonged periods of wet weather will promote these diseases. Rotating the tomatoes to another part of the garden can be helpful, but these diseases can survive in the soil for several years. Most heirloom tomatoes varieties like German Johnson have little disease resistance and will grow poorly if planted in the same space for several years. The best solution is to plant disease resistant varieties like Better Boy or Parks Whopper.


Early Blight

While you may be able to avoid the soilborne diseases, nobody can escape early blight. This is the most common fungal disease on tomatoes and can infect leaves, stems and fruit. It starts out as small brownish black lesions on older leaves and develops rapidly during humid or wet weather. Often the leaf tissue around the spot will turn yellow. After a large number of leaf spots form, the entire leaf may turn yellow, then brown and the leaf dies. As the disease progresses, more leaves die and expose the fruit to sunscald. Early blight fruit infections may cause up to 50% of the immature fruit to drop. Often early blight will kill the entire plant.

So then what is the answer for the early blight problem? Since there are few tomatoes that have early blight resistance, fungicide sprays must be started early and continued regularly throughout the season. Mancozeb is one of the more effective fungicides, but has a five day preharvest interval. That means you must wait five days after applying mancozeb before harvesting the tomatoes. This makes mancozeb a good early season fungicide, but not very useful once the tomatoes begin ripening. Daconil and most other chlorothalonil products usually have a zero day preharvest interval which is more useful during harvest.

Organic options for early blight control include fixed copper sprays. Copper fungicides are also fairly effective on some of the bacterial leaf spots that can infect tomatoes. Serenade is a new biofungicide that is labeled for early blight suppression. Both Serenade and the copper sprays have a zero day preharvest interval. As always read the pesticide label carefully and follow the instructions for that product.

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

Extension Master Gardener
NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

May Garden Tips

If it seems like you just get home as your flowers are closing up for the day, try annuals that are at their best at twilight. Evening flowers open at night or release their fragrance at night to attract night-flying pollinators such as moths. Petunias open by day and release their scent at night. Flowering tobacco is a night bloomer with a sweet scent. Moonflower vine, angel trumpet, night phlox and night-scented stock are a few other choices. Select white-flowering varieties of other plants for the best visual impact as daylight fades.

When spring-flowering shrubs have finished blooming, prune where needed.

Wait until tomatoes set their first hand of fruit before fertilizing with 10-10-10. Repeat in 3 weeks. When the soil temperature reaches 70 degrees, it's time to plant warm-weather vegetables such as lima beans, southern peas, okra, sweet potatoes, peppers, watermelon and cantaloupes.

Begin fertilizing Bermudagrass lawns this month at the rate of 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. Reapply at this rate in June, July and August. Apply half this amount in September.

Mowing your lawn at the proper height for the type of grass is especially important as temperatures rise. Keep Bermudagrass lawns at around one inch. Fescue and fescue-bluegrass lawns should be cut no shorter than 3-1/2 inches. These heights will help maximize turf density and crowd out weeds as well as the other, less desirable grass type.

Remember to water newly-planted shrubs and trees unless there is an inch or more of natural rainfall during the week. A two- to three-inch layer of fresh mulch will help conserve moisture and keep the soil cool. Keep the mulch a few inches away from the trunks of the plants.

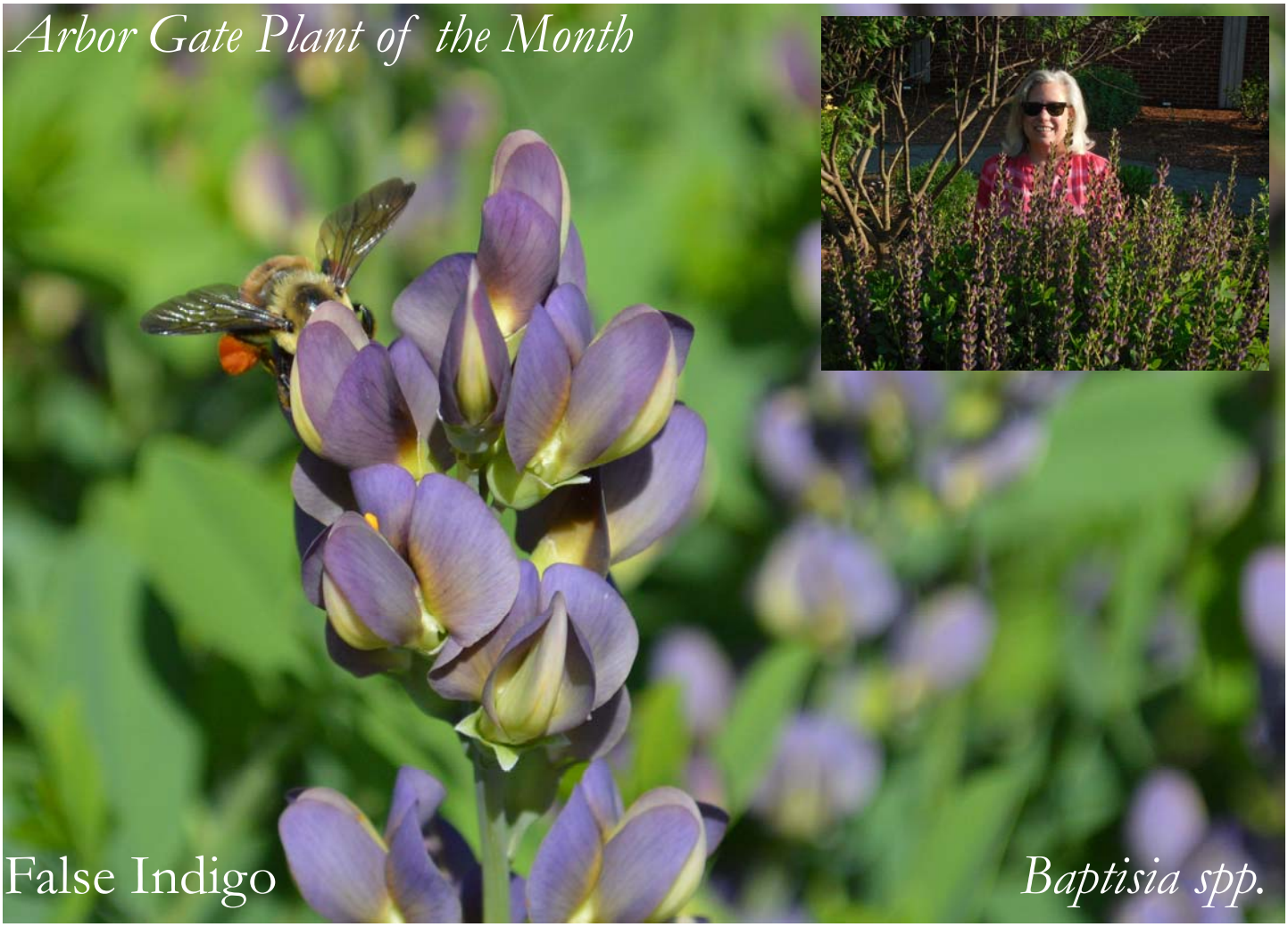
Fertilize blueberries, blackberries and grapes this month. Find out just what your berries need with a free soil test from Cooperative Extension Service. Phone 570-6740 for more information.

Continue to plant summer-flowering bulbs in the flower border. Cannas, callas, dahlias, gladiolas caladiums and elephant ears are a few colorful choices. Pinch out growth tips of newly-planted annuals to promote branching and make stockier plants. Continue to remove spent flowers of annuals and perennials throughout the season.

When spraying to combat insect pests, keep in mind that beneficial insects share the same plants as the bad guys. Use low-toxicity pesticides when possible, spray at dusk, and avoid spraying flowers as pesticide residues can harm bees. Always read and follow label directions for safe pesticide application. When in doubt of pest or plant, call Cooperative Extension for help: 336-570-6740.

Move your houseplants outdoors when night temperatures stay above 60 degrees. Avoid sunburn on the leaves by moving the plants gradually from the relative darkness of the house to their bright summer location. Start in a shady spot and progress slowly to brighter light.

Arbor Gate Plant of the Month



False Indigo *Baptisia spp.*

Baptisias, also known as false or wild indigos (*Baptisia* spp.), are a group of large, long-lived perennials. They provide an extended season of interest from flowers and foliage. The botanical name *Baptisia* originates from the Greek word *bapto*, to dip or to dye. Blue false indigo (*Baptisia australis*) and yellow wild indigo (*Baptisia tinctoria*) were used to produce a blue dye by both Native Americans and settlers before the introduction of the better quality true indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria*). The dried seed pods served as children's rattles.

Add this undemanding native to your sunny perennial border. Drought tolerant and deer resistant, *Baptisia* resents transplanting, but grows readily from seed. Collect the seeds in summer when the pods darken and begin to split. Sow them fresh, either in pots or directly in the garden. Or you may propagate from softwood cuttings taken in late April or early May. Height of the mound varies by species, but averages around 3 feet tall by 3 feet wide. The flowers are a favorite of bees and *Baptisia* is a host plant for several species of butterfly.

Read more here:

https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/all/baptisia-spp/