



Coming Events

Workshops and Demonstrations

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
Thurs., Aug 6, 10:00a
Hydroponics
Thurs., Aug 20, 10:00a
Fall Lawn Care

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/>

Contact us :

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Harvesting the Rain



Water has been in the news quite a bit recently. They have had terrible flooding in Texas from too much rain. California has had very little rain and is in a severe drought. While it has gotten dry in our area, we are fortunate to not have such extremes in our weather. Rain or lack of rain has always been a challenge for farmers and gardeners.

My garden is looking good despite the lack of rain. On the positive side, less rain means less foliar disease problems. Of course the downside is a much higher water bill to operate the drip irrigation system.

Rainwater harvesting is one technique you can use to reduce the cost of watering the garden. It can be as simple as a rain barrel or you can install a cistern that can hold hundreds (or thousands) of gallons of water.

Catch It If You Can!

Rain barrels have become more popular in the last few years because of droughts and water restrictions, but rainwater harvesting has been practiced for centuries.

There is an additional benefit of using rainwater to water your garden besides saving money on your water bill. Several nutrients that plants need like nitrogen, phosphorus and sulfur are found in rainwater. That is one reason why your lawn and garden always look better after a good rain. Capturing and using the rainwater on your garden also keeps these nutrients from contributing to the contamination of surface waters.



There are four basic parts to any rainwater harvesting system. The first part is the barrel or cistern that stores the captured water. Plastic containers are usually less expensive than wood or metal, but may not be the most attractive. Another consideration is the color of the container. Many plastic containers are translucent and will allow enough light inside the container to permit algae to grow. The algae is not harmful to plants, but may clog the outlet or hose. There are special paints that will stick to plastic that can make the containers more attractive and reduce algae growth.

The second part is the gutter system on your home or garden shed that collects the rain from the roof and directs it towards the barrel or cistern. Many hardware and home improvement stores will have the piping and fittings you need to connect the downspout to the container.

Once the barrel or cistern is full the water needs somewhere to go. It is a good idea to install an overflow pipe that allows excess water to leave the container in a controlled manner instead of spilling out the top.

The last part is the outlet that can be used to fill a bucket or connect to a garden hose. Many people want to connect a soaker hose or a drip line to their rain barrel, but usually don't get good results because of low water pressure. It takes a little over two feet of elevation to produce one pound of water pressure and unless the barrel or cistern is fairly high off the ground you won't have much pressure.

If you are interested in learning more about harvesting rainwater, you should plan to attend our Think Green Thursdays class on June 4. We will discuss how to install and use rain barrels and cisterns. After the lecture we will take some time to go outside and talk about our recently installed 300 gallon cistern that we will use to water our hardy tropicals garden. There is also a good publication on rainwater harvesting that can be found here:

<http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/rainwater-harvesting-guidance-for-homeowners.pdf>

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





June Garden Tips

Even moisture is a key to preventing bitter cucumbers, underdeveloped onions and blossom-end rot in tomatoes. Implement a regular watering schedule when rainfall is less than one inch per week. To save water, keep the garden mulched and use drip irrigation or soaker hoses.

Try hilling 4" of soil around the bases of gladioli when they are about a foot tall to keep them from toppling over.

Remove spent flowers from your annuals or herbaceous perennials to keep them blooming. Self-cleaning flowers save time and work in the garden by dropping dead blooms, eliminating the need for extensive grooming. This easy-care list includes ageratum, cleome, gomphrena, impatiens, New Guinea impatiens, pentas, wax begonia and narrowleaf zinnia.

Watch for leaf galls on azaleas and camellias. Prune off these fungus-infected parts and dispose of them in the trash. Clean your pruners in a ten-percent bleach solution between cuts to prevent spreading the disease.

Continue to plant all kinds of beans and southern peas. Make second plantings of tomatoes, cucumbers and squash for a late crop when older plants are fizzling.

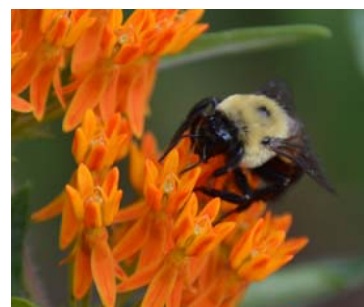
Add a light fertilizer side dressing to vegetables that have begun to set fruit. Be careful not to over fertilize okra. Excess nitrogen will cause rank growth but little fruit.

Before you start swatting and scratching, keep in mind that anything that collects more than one tablespoon of water will support a generation of mosquitoes. Empty and refill birdbaths and pet water dishes at least once a week. Empty saucers under pots or eliminate the saucers all together. Places that collect water and can't be emptied are candidates for mosquito 'dunks' - floating rings that contain a bacteria toxic to mosquito larvae but not to pond fish or pets. Call us for more information.

Rake up and discard all fallen fruit from underneath fruit trees to discourage insects and diseases.

Control Japanese beetles by hand picking and tossing into a jar filled with soapy water. This is most easily done in the early morning when the insects are sluggish.

Have all pests - weed, insect, mite, or plant disease - properly identified before following a treatment regimen. Correct diagnosis leads to proper pest control practices and timing of application. Incorrect diagnosis may lead to misuse of pesticides and little or no control of the pest. Contact the Alamance County Cooperative Extension Service for assistance: 336-570-6740. When using any pesticide, wear pesticide resistant gloves, long pants and closed shoes. Always read and follow label instructions and keep children and pets off treated areas until completely dry. Be mindful that many insecticides are harmful to pollinators, so if you must spray, spray at dusk and avoid spraying flowers.



Arbor Gate Plant of the Month

Butterfly Weed

Asclepias tuberosa

You may have seen this sturdy native's standard bright orange splashed along the roadside on your Sunday drive. The flowers of this milkweed family member are a favorite source of nectar for bees as well as butterflies and the leaves are also a food-source for Monarch butterfly caterpillars.

Asclepias tuberosa is easy to grow in average, dry to medium, well-drained soil in full sun. This native plant is drought tolerant and does well in poor, dry soils. The new growth tends to emerge late in the spring, so be patient. Plants are easily grown from seed and mature plants may freely self-seed in the landscape if seed pods are not removed prior to splitting open. Don't worry though, Butterfly weed won't become an invasive pest. Due to its deep taproot, this plant does not transplant well and is probably best left undisturbed once established.

In addition to the standard bright orange, red and yellow varieties sometimes occur.

Add a long season of bloom and low incidence of pest or disease problems and you have a great addition to your pollinator garden or perennial border.

Read more here:

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/all/asclepias-tuberosa/>

