THE GARDEN PATH, SEPTEMBER 2015

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Extension Master Gardener Volunteers

PLANT OF THE MONTH By Marty Finkel

Pindo palm, jelly palm (*Butia capitata*)

Let's go for a tropical look with a cold-hardy palm as the plant of the month. This palm is single trunked and is easily recognizable by its rounded canopy of blue-gray, strongly recurved, graceful fronds which curve toward the trunk. It produces large, showy clusters of orange-yellow, juicy, edible fruits the size of large dates. This fruit can be used to make jams and jellies. It grows to 15 to 25' tall by 10 to 15' wide, although it isn't often seen this large because the growth rate is very slow. Plant it in full to part-sun or part-shade in average, well-drained soil. It is drought tolerant once established.

Palm photo courtesy of JC Raulston Arboretum

GARDEN CHECKLIST By Mary Jane Bosworth

Although it is hot, hot, hot it is getting to be time to think of tasks that make cooler weather more enjoyable.

- ✓ Plant Pansies for splashes of winter color.
- ✓ Now is the time to order spring bulbs in time for planting in October and November planting.
- ✓ Collect seeds for planting next spring from zinnias, marigolds, melapodium and any other plant that you wish.
- ✓ Cut back impatiens to encourage new growth.
- ✓ Keep harvesting your figs before the birds do.
- ✓ Dry herbs for the winter. Make pesto. Freeze basil and chives.
- ✓ Control winter weeds with a pre-emergent herbicide applied between September 1-15.
- ✓ Prepare plants for winter. Do not prune them at this time. Avoid fertilizing and gradually decrease watering. Plants will have a greater degree of winter hardiness.

GARDEN TO DO By Carl Shafer

The Garden Professors have a new address: (http: //gardenprofessors.com)
For September:

Remember early September is the recommended time to treat for peachtree bores. See the August 15 issue for details.

Prune out fire blight killed wood from apples, pears, and pyracantha if you have not already done so. Be sure to check crab apples and Bradford pears also. If you wait until winter it will be more difficult to determine the dead wood.

Continue to remove spent crops and plant cool weather fall crops, cover crops or cover the bare ground with a layer of mulch that can be tilled under in the spring. It is too late for beans, cucumbers, and squash unless you use robust frost protection (ie Row covers with tunnels or hoop houses.). You can try cool weather cole plants, but they should have been set out in late July or August. Cool weather seeded crops include: kale, lettuce, mustard, onions, radishes, spinach, and turnips. See the August 15 issue for more details and web links.

Carefully monitor your fall crops for insects. See the NC Chemical Manual for recommended treatments or contact your local extension agent. Always follow label instructions and observe minimum days to harvest waiting period.

In the later part of the month, clip new blossoms off tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants so that the last

fruits will mature quicker.

Late fall or early winter is the best time to plant trees and shrubs. If you are planning to start or expand tree and nut plantings, you should check local plant nurseries and/or online/mail order sources to have plants when needed. Small fruits are usually planted in the spring.

For October

The average first frost date (32^0 F or less) for Henderson for 1981-2010 is Oct 20 with the earliest occurring Oct 1, 1993 and the latest occurring Nov 9, 1985. The average first freeze date (28^o F or less) is Nov 4 with the earliest occurring Oct 13, 1988 and the latest occurring Dec 3, 1985. Note that low areas that collect cold air will often have frost earlier, and in town, sheltered areas, and hillsides that allow cold air to drain away may have frost later in the fall.

We often have two or three weeks of nice weather after the first frost in the fall. See above. To avail oneself of this additional growing time for tender vegetables (green beans, summer squash, tomatoes, peppers, etc.) have frost protection material ready to use when frost is predicted. Materials to consider: Row covers – light weight and easy to use, Sheets and blankets – need support structures because of their weight, Plastics – need to be kept off of the foliage and removed in the morning before sunshine hits to prevent overheating. When a hard freeze is forecast, harvest your tender and semi-hardy vegetables. See the Aug 15 Issue for web links with more details on season extenders including extending into the winter season. Note that little or no growth is expected when daylight is 10 hours or less. This occurs between about Nov 24 and Jan 17. Also the average low low temperature of 24^{o}F occurs from about January 4 thru January 27 and the average low high temperature of 48^{o}F from about January 2 thru January 16. Combining these indicates that little growth can be expected during December and January. To get growth in this period it will be necessary to provide supplemental heat and light. For comparison the shortest daylight is 9 hr 41 min around Dec 21, equal day and night around Mar17 and Sept 25, and the longest is 14 hr 38 min around June 19. These times, dates and temperatures are for Henderson.

Continue to monitor your fall vegetables for insects. See Sept recommendations above.

Harvest sweet potatoes, gourds, pumpkins, and winter squash before frost.

As fall clean-up continues, remove any diseased plants and leaves from the garden area and discard. Do not compost this material. If considering a cover crop, see the Aug 15 Issue for web links in the NCOrganic-Prduction section. A relatively new cover crop is forage radish. This is the 'Daikon' or 'Japanese' radish. To learn about this crop do a web search for: Fact Sheet 824, Maryland Cooperative Extension.

Fall is an ideal time to have soil tests done on garden and lawn areas. If lime is needed, fall is an excellent time to apply it. The freezing and thawing in winter helps work the lime into the soil in areas that are not cultivated. Remember that there is now a fee charged for soil tests submitted from December through March. Tests submitted from April through November will continue to be free. Plan accordingly!

Use a bagging lawn mower to chop and collect leaves. The chopped leaves can be used for mulch, tilled into the garden, or composted.

You can continue planting radishes, spinach, leaf lettuce, and Asian greens (includes mustards) but season extension practices will be needed for best results. Garlic can be planted through Nov.

Be sure to clean up around fruit trees at the end of the season.

A useful extension publication is "Less Toxic Insecticides" from Clemson.
www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/pests/pesticide/hgic2770.html.

THE TYROS' CORNER By Eileen Novak

You know, as I learn more and do more it occurs to me that a garden is like a toddler: lovely, amusing, charming….. just don't turn your back on either one!

Take toddlers – they seem to find the only thing in an entire room (that you thought you baby-proofed) to harm themselves, their siblings, or the cats. And just leave a garden untended for a couple of weeks in the summer and you know the meaning of overgrown.

After an early bad start, my tomatoes seemed to be going well, the beans were beginning to produce and the zucchini and cantaloupes seemed promising. Then my husband had surgery. It was planned, thankfully, not as a result of an accident but almost as harrowing an experience. Thinking I would leave him at 9 when visiting hours ended and go home to sleep, then get up and go in when I had done some slight weeding and watering around the

house, I left the vegetable garden nicely weeded and thoroughly watered with the new soaker hoses we had purchased. My husband's surgery was extensive and I should have paid more attention to the doctor when he looked my husband dead in the eye and said "this surgery is going to be life-altering". It was. The doctor neglected to say WHOSE life would be most altered, however.

I managed not to go home at all for the entire time my husband was incarcerated in the house of healing, largely due to friends who stopped by to feed/care for the cats and water a few things. I should maybe have left out the watering in the request? The first week he was home, he was unable to do much by himself - it was back surgery so he had to relearn how to move. I didn't leave his side for more than 15 minutes. The next week, we had appointments that we had made prior to the surgery, not realizing that the act of putting on clothes and getting to the car would almost exhaust him. We made it through that week. After that, I had a 3-day stint with the 4-H camp that I had committed to when we thought his surgery would be sometime in May. During this time, I did not make it out to the vegetable garden ONCE. The next 2 weeks we had our grandson (6 years old and full of questions) and he and I did go out, only to be appalled at the amount of growth on the part of the weeds and the cowardly retreat on the part of the beets, kale, kohlrabi, radishes and everything else I put out there. The tomatoes were hanging on, barely, but clearly the worse for the crowding by the hip-high grass that had grown so explosively in the heat.

The next time some suburban homeowner complains of the difficulty of starting a lawn, I'll simply tell him to plant vegetables – he'll get more grass in the garden than he could ever wish for.

So the answer, it occurs to me, is not to depend on my former method of attacking garden chores – going out early in the morning to work for several hours till the heat chases me in. After all, I wear a pedometer so I can make sure I get in my 10,000 steps daily, and it is 95 steps to the garden gate. Pulling weeds 3 different times gives me close to 600 steps just out to the garden and back, so giving myself small snippets of weed-pulling rather than 3 to 4 hour sessions might help on 2 different fronts. Plus the fact that a long stint of weed pulling inevitably gives me blisters, necessitating that I rest the next day. I'll try to remember this reasoning, because there are more potential surgeries in the future: left knee replacement, hernia, etc, etc…..

So friends, I hope my musings might help you if you are feeling over-weed-whelmed. Breaking gardening into smaller chunks might give less satisfaction than weeding out an entire row, but you'll be able to get back at the chore more readily. As always, try to learn from the mistakes of others – you don't have time to make them all yourself!

INTERESTING TID-BITS By Marty Finkel

Tidbit:

Perhaps the most serious pest of crucifer crops (cabbage, canola, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, and kale) is the diamondback moth (DBM), and efforts to control it costs farmers around the world up to $5 billion every year. The moth is poorly controlled using current methods, and there is evidence that it is becoming resistant to insecticides. On July 16, 2015, there was a news release that British scientists have bred a genetically modified moth to reduce populations of DBM using the self-limiting gene technique. Dr. Neil Morrison, the lead research scientist at Oxitec (Oxford University), is co-author with Tony Shelton, Professor Entomology at Cornell University on the paper explaining the technique and findings published in the journal *BMC Biology*. This approach is species specific, meaning that it affects only the targeted pest population. Birds or other animals can eat the insects with no adverse effects since the gene is non-toxic. Just what is self-limiting gene technology? In this case, the natural reproductive instincts of the male moth were altered to effect sterility, and when they mate, their female offspring do not survive to reproduce, thus reducing the pest population. In the publication, scientists from the US, UK, and China show that DBM populations in greenhouses were well controlled in 8 weeks. This technique has been used with dengue fever-carrying mosquitoes in Brazil, Panama and the Cayman Islands with over 90% reduction in the mosquito population. Professor Shelton is planning studies in upstate NY, including field cage tests this summer with plans for small-scale field releases in the future. The upcoming trials have already been approved by the USDA.

The open-access paper " Pest control and resistance management through release of insects carrying a male-selecting transgene" published in *BMC Biology*, visit: http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12915-015-0161-1
Professor Shelton's DBM page at Cornell U. is http://bit.ly/1Cd9CYZ

Tidbit:

N.C. Tomato Man, Craig LeHoullier, is responsible for naming and saving the Cherokee Purple tomato. In 1990, he received a packet of tomato seeds in the mail from John Green of Sevierville, TN, who wrote that the seeds were from very good tomatoes he'd gotten from a woman who received them from her neighbors. The neighbors said the tomatoes had been in their family for 100 years, and that the seeds originally came from the Cherokee Indians. LeHoullier was so impressed with the taste of the tomatoes the color of a "bad leg bruise" that he named them Cherokee Purple and sent some seeds to friends at a few seed companies. One of these was Rob Johnston, the founder and CEO of Johnny's Selected Seeds who said it's rare that an amateur seed saver discovers a variety that becomes commercially popular. As for stories that accompany heirloom seeds, LeHoullier says it's always hard to judge their accuracy, but it's part of the fascinating and frustrating aspects of pursuing heirlooms.

As for the Cherokee legend, Joe Brunetti, a horticulturist with the Smithsonian Gardens who manages the Victory Garden at the National Museum of American History, says it's quite conceivable that the Cherokees were growing tomatoes in Tennessee over 100 years ago. It's grown in the Victory Garden because it tolerates the humidity and diseases there better than the other dark tomatoes – which makes sense if it originally comes from the Tennessee River Valley, also humid.

Last year LeHoullier turned his 30 years' experiences of growing and seed-saving into a book, "Epic Tomatoes," published by Storey Publishing, and it has already gone into a second printing. In it you can discover Dester, which LeHoullier says is one of the best he has ever eaten, the Viva Lindsey Kentucky Heirloom that was given as a wedding present, Mexican Midget, Lillian's Yellow Heirloom, and dozens of others. The book covers planning, planting, growing, maintenance, care, harvest, saving seeds, breeding your own, Q & A, troubleshooting disease, pests, and other problems, appendices, and resources. His website is http://nctomatoman.weebly.com/ and contains great information.

From an online Aug. 2013 "the salt" NPR article by Eliza Barclay, a 7-29-15 N&O Life section article by Andrea Weigl, and other sources.

MOONLIGHT PLANTS By Edna Gaston

The recent blue moon started my mind to twirling. I started thinking about herbs whose foliage or flowers would provide a spectacular show by moonlight. So here are some thoughts.

Silver and grey foliage plays many roles in a garden by day – highlight and brighten some colors or tone down some vivid colors. But at night they reflect the light – by the light of the silvery moon. There are many plants besides herbs that would be delightful choices, some even provide fragrance. But I shall list a few that I grow, have grown or want to grow:

Artemisia – there are many cultivars with beautiful silvery foliage. One of my favorites is Southernwood. It smells like moth balls, only not as strong.

Lamb's Ear – the leaves are so soft, the plant makes a wonderful border.

Curry – beautiful grey foliage, very similar to Rosemary, with a delightful scent

Dittany-of-Crete – never have grown this one but heard about it in Harry Potter and like the name. It is a relative of Oregano and Marjoram

Horehound – very similar to mint but not as invasive, great plant for the garden. Also a good filler for a container.

Russian Sage – very frequently called *Perovskia,* its botanical name, to distinguish it from the more familiar garden sages or Salvia. Not as well-known as other herbs, it is a great addition to the garden

Lavender Cotton – two varieties, green and grey, this plant is also known as Santolina. It is low-growing and evergreen

Thyme – one of the many varieties is Silver Thyme, delightful plant. Good as a groundcover, to fill in spaces among rocks or as a spiller in a container

Sage – the traditional salvia which includes several cultivars. My favorite is Berggarten Sage but any and all will provide enjoyment.

Lavender – no garden is complete without Lavendula. Many cultivars are available. Like sage, it is a little "touchy" to grow.

To learn more about the specific growing requirements of these or any other herbs, check a good reference book. My first choice is Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs but my bookcase has many others. Experiment and have fun!

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