

# Successful Gardener

NC STATE UNIVERSITY NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Helping  
Carolinians  
Increase Their  
Knowledge of  
Gardening,  
Manage Their  
Landscape  
Investment &  
Protect the  
Environment

## JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

### Tropicals Pack a Punch with Foliage, Color, Size

Tropicals, many of which can be considered tender perennials, are plants that seem to shout, "Look at me!" Gardeners find it hard to resist the dramatic punch and exotic interest that these plants add through foliage, texture, color, size and flowers. Some of these plants cannot survive our winters and must be protected, or replanted each year. However, many surprisingly live through Zone 7 winters. Douglas Rühren, horticulturist at the Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden, which features many such plants, spoke recently at the JC Raulston Arboretum. Here are some of his recommendations for "hardy tender" perennials in Zone 7 or warmer.

Bananas lend an exotic element and fill large spaces. Consider *Musa basjoo*, Japanese fiber banana, *Musa velutina*, pink velvet banana or *Musa acuminata* 'Zebrina'. The blood banana 'Bordelon' is also a good choice for North Carolina.

Ginger lilies are making a comeback as more people rediscover their graceful touch. *Hedychium* 'Daniel Weeks' and 'Peach Delight' are good performers. Other excellent choices are 'C.P. Raffle,' 'Dr. Moy' and 'Moy Giant'. The tall, late-blooming 'Elizabeth' is also lovely.

Elephant ears provide an old-fashioned touch. Look for *Alocasia x* 'Portadora', *Colocasia esculenta* 'Burgundy Stem', 'Illustris' and 'Black Magic'.

Cannas add punctuation with their green, red or striped foliage and intense tropical-looking flowers. Try *Canna* 'Striata' and 'Phaison'. A tried and true standby is the caladium. Look for the fancy-leaved varieties such as 'White Christmas', 'Carolyn Wharton', 'Red Ruffles' and 'Miss Muffet'.

A stunning display of tropical plants can be enjoyed at the Entry Garden of the JC Raulston Arboretum. Located at the entrance to the main parking lot, the kaleidoscope of color and texture delights the senses until the first killing frost, usually in mid to late October. *David Barkley*

*Hedychium*  
'Lemon Beauty'

Robert E. Lyons ©

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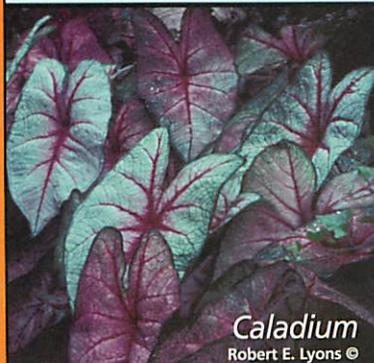
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*Caladium*  
Robert E. Lyons ©



*Black Magic Elephant Ear*  
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*Musa basjoo*  
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*Plume Celosia*



Robert E. Lyons ©  
*Tall Cosmos*



Robert E. Lyons ©  
*'Lemon Aura' Sunflower*

## Plant a Cutting Garden for Season-Long Enjoyment

Few pleasures in life are as simple yet luxurious as surrounding yourself with flowers, indoors and out. Great satisfaction comes when your vases are overflowing with homegrown blossoms. Annuals are some of the easiest cut flowers to grow and will give you multiple blooms all season. Set aside a special area in your vegetable garden, along a fence or beside the garage for your annual cut flower garden. Most cut flowers require full sun and adequate drainage, along with access to water. In the home garden setting there are very few disease and insect problems that affect cut flowers. Follow the same fertilization practices you use in your vegetable garden for optimal growth.

Choices abound when it comes to annual flowers for cutting. Sunflowers, zinnias, celosia, rudbeckias (black-eyed Susan) and cosmos are great for first-time growers. The popularity of sunflowers has led to some exciting new varieties designed for use as cut flowers. 'Pro Cut Bicolor', 'Pro Cut Yellow', 'Pro Cut Orange', 'Sunbright' and 'Moonbright' are pollenless which adds to their vase life and makes them an excellent choice. 'Velvet Queen' and 'Prada Red' boast a beautiful red burgundy color, not the traditional color for a sunflower. Also consider *Helianthus annuus* 'Sunset' or 'Lemon Aura'. Stagger the planting of sunflowers throughout the summer and you will have blooms into the fall.

*Celosia cristata* or cockscomb will flower from midsummer until frost, and will last a week in the vase. Zinnias are the workhorse of

the flower garden; they like hot, dry weather. Zinnias come in a wide variety of colors, shapes and sizes. Stagger your plantings of zinnia every two weeks until midsummer and you will have blooms until frost. Another option is *Cosmos bipinnatus*, which produces lots of flowers and is charming in bouquets. However, cosmos does not have a long vase life.

Seed all of these plants directly into the garden. When selecting the type of flowers to grow, look for annual varieties bred specifically for cutting.

A few perennials to consider are Shasta daisies, coneflowers, salvias and gladiolus. Gladiolus are actually best suited as cut flowers because they can tend to get lost or look out of place in permanent display gardens. By staggering the plantings every 2 weeks, from early May until July, you will have a constant supply until October. Bring in the corms every fall, overwinter and replant the following year.

Harvest cut flowers in the morning when they are crisp and turgid with water. Take a clean bucket of lukewarm water with you and plunge the stems into the water immediately after cutting. Use a sharp knife or shears for the best success since a clean cut will preserve the water-conducting tissue of the plant and keep the blooms robust longer. It is important to keep your shears, buckets and vases clean, as bacteria can easily shorten the vase life of your flowers.

*Amy-Lynn Albertson*

## Summer Bulbs

Summer bulbs are summer-blooming plants that have some type of underground storage structure. Scientifically speaking, many are not bulbs but actually rhizomes, tubers or corms. Rhizomatous irises, lilies and daylilies will perennialize, but some summer bulbs are tender – they must be dug after the first frost. Stored in a dry place, they can be replanted each spring. Even with this added challenge, summer bulbs offer exciting forms, fragrances and colors to enhance the landscape. They add the brilliant color you need in borders, groundcovers, rock gardens, containers or hanging baskets.

The “tough guys,” those that will perennialize, include rhizomatous irises, lilies and daylilies. Rhizomatous irises

offer many species and colors, including the elusive color blue. An early summer bloomer, easy to grow and fast to spread, they prefer full sun or partial shade. Lilies have a wide variety of flower colors and shapes, from trumpet, saucer, pillow and “Turk’s cap” shapes, to freckles! They make great cut flowers and offer dazzling color when planted in informal masses throughout the garden. Daylilies bloom from early summer until frost. In addition to providing almost every color imaginable, they are excellent erosion control plants. Natural areas and perennial gardens are highlighted by daylilies when used as background plants. Heights range from 12 inches to 4 feet.



Robert E. Lyons ©  
*Tuberous Begonia*

see Summer Bulbs on page 3

## Q&A How do I manage weeds in wildflower plantings?

Since the preferred planting time for wildflowers is October and November, now is the time to begin the necessary steps to prevent weeds before planting. A site analysis is the first step. The surrounding area and weed history of the site are good indicators of future problems.

Start in the spring and summer with cultivation and repeated applications of Roundup herbicide. Covering and removing clear plastic over the site can reduce the time between applications of weed killers as it warms the soil faster to stimulate new weed growth. Dazomet (Basamid), an herbicide, is another option. It is a soil fumigant and needs to be rototilled into the soil and watered in to kill weed seeds as they germinate.

Covering with plastic will improve the effectiveness. There is a 14- to 20-day waiting period before planting.

Blend several inches of organic matter, compost or fine pine bark into the soil to get good seed germination and a quick cover before planting. After planting, apply a thin layer of clean straw or pine needles over the top.

If an established wildflower planting has a slight problem with weeds, you may need to hand-weed to minimize soil disturbance; spot treat with an herbicide like Roundup; apply an over-the-top herbicide like Vantage or Ornamec (for grasses only); or mow close, before weeds set seed.

See [www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-645](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-645) for more details. **Don Breedlove**

## Summer Bulbs

*continued from page 2*

Tender favorites require a little more work, but many bright rewards. Caladiums have heart-shaped leaves from 6 to 12 inches in diameter. Variegated, red, white, salmon and green colors liven up shaded areas. After digging, dry and store them at 70 to 75 degrees. Dahlias like full sun to partial shade, and bloom in late summer. They require adequate moisture and good drainage. Some cultivars grow as high as 7 feet with 3- to 12-inch flowers. Store them at 35 to 45 degrees. Gladiolus are easy to grow, offer many colors, and provide a linear aspect to your garden with long flower spikes. Store at 40 degrees. Tuberous begonias require special attention to proper watering, partial shade and fertile soil. The extra work required is a great investment. The spectacular range of colors, from soft pastels to brilliant solid colors, is a gardener's delight. Store these gems in dry peat moss at 35 to 41 degrees.

When the hot summer sun is baking and browning everything in sight, summer bulbs will provide a delightful display of color! **Mike Wilder**

## ENVIRO-TIP

### Alternatives to Gas-Powered Mowers

Lawns are a main element of most North Carolina landscapes. A well-maintained lawn adds value to your home. Lawns also help clean our air and filter surface water runoff. Mowing the lawn on a regular basis helps keep the lawn healthy, but using gas-powered mowers can contribute to air pollution. Manual reel mowers and electric mowers are alternatives.

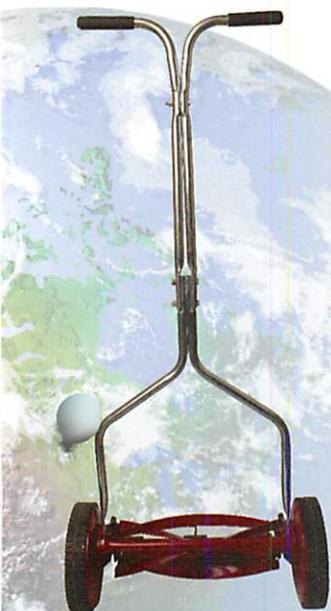
Manual reel mowers work well with small lawns. A lawn area of less than 8,000 square feet can be maintained reasonably well with a reel mower. It typically takes 50 percent longer to mow with a reel mower than with a power mower. Larger areas can be mowed, but the amount of time and effort required takes the fun out of using a reel mower. Some of the advantages of the reel mower are quiet operation, low maintenance costs and environmental friendliness.

Reel mowers do have some disadvantages. The biggest disadvantage is mowing height. Most reel mowers have a maximum cutting height of 1.5

inches. That height may be acceptable for some warm-season grasses but would be a real problem with tall fescue. Tall fescue prefers to be mowed at least 3 inches high and 3.5 inches is better. The other main disadvantage is the difficulty reel mowers have with mowing tall grass and weeds. Tall vegetation tends to lie down and not get mowed. It also becomes more difficult to push the mower when the grass gets tall.

Electric mowers may be a more desirable alternative to gas-powered mowers. They are quieter than gas-powered mowers and will mow taller grass and weeds than a reel mower. Electric mowers are still best suited to small lawns. Corded models are more powerful than battery models, but the cord can be aggravating to handle and limits your range from the outlet. Battery models provide more freedom of movement, but have a limited run time before the batteries need recharging.

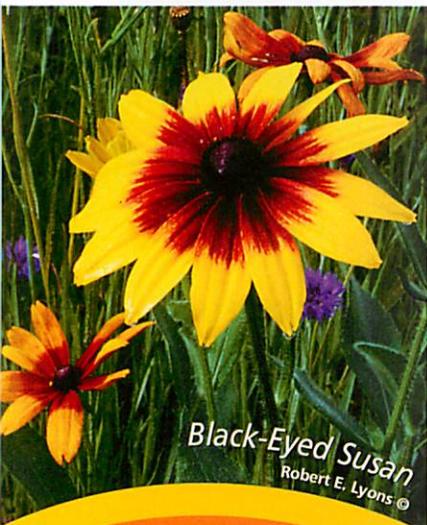
**Mark Danieley**



## gardentalk



*"A flower touches everyone's heart."*  
**Georgia O'Keefe**



*Black-Eyed Susan*  
Robert E. Lyons ©

Garden Spot

Fresh homegrown fruits and vegetables are at their peak and now is the time when consumers can take advantage of **North Carolina's regional farmers' markets.** One of the joys of shopping regional markets is purchasing quality farm-fresh produce, baked goods, jams and jellies, cut flowers and landscape materials. Shoppers have the opportunity to speak to those who grow locally grown products and learn about these crops. Admission is free and open to the public. Some of the markets feature educational and promotional events such as strawberry day or watermelon day. Tour groups and buses are always welcome.

The five farmers markets operated by the N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services are located in Asheville, Raleigh, Charlotte, Piedmont Triad and Lumberton. Find more detailed information at [www.ncagr.com](http://www.ncagr.com) or phone (919) 733-7125.

*Darrell Blackwelder*

## Gardening in June and July

### Lawns

- Start warm-season grasses in June.
- Continue to fertilize warm-season grasses but do not fertilize cool-season grasses.
- Change directions when mowing the lawn. Travel north to south on one mowing and go east to west on the next cutting.
- Apply lawn insecticide containing imidacloprid to prevent Japanese beetle and June beetle eggs from hatching in August.

### Ornamentals

- Trim white pine in late June. Prune new growth only.
- Prune narrowleaf evergreens in June and bigleaf and florist hydrangeas when flowers fade.
  - Prune bleeder trees such as maple, dogwood, birch and elm in July.
- Fertilize landscape plants by July 15 and continue to scout and spray for bagworms on landscape ornamentals.
  - Pinch fall garden mums in June and again the first week of July to encourage branching and to control height.
    - Watch for powdery mildew on crape myrtles and roses and apply a fungicide when necessary.

### Edibles

- Plant late vegetables such as Southern peas and sweet potatoes during June. Remember to plant some late tomatoes to ensure fresh tomatoes late in the season.
  - Check asparagus plants for asparagus beetle and spray with the proper insecticide as needed.
  - Renovate the strawberry bed when harvest is complete to guarantee a good yield on next year's crop.
  - Check tomato plants often for signs of early blight and be prepared to apply fungicides at frequent intervals.
  - Vegetable gardens need at least one inch of water per week to guarantee good yields.

*Donna Teasley*

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