

Master Gardener Volunteers of Clay County FAQs

How can I learn more about specific plants? NC State has a great website with photos and characteristics of NC plants. Enter the plant name in the Search Bar, use “Find a Plant” to find the perfect plant for a specific location, or use “Design Gallery” for landscape ideas. Go to <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu> or use your camera and the QR code here.

What should I consider when buying a plant? How big will it get, how much sun or shade, how much water, and what USDA hardiness zone. Perennials come back each year but many only bloom for a few weeks or months. If your objective is all-season color, choose several plants from each bloom season, and consider adding some annuals for summer long color.

How much sun? “Full sun” is at least 6 hours a day, but many vegetables need 8 to 10 per day. “Partial sun” or “Partial shade” is 3-6 per day. Shade is typically 2 hours or less, and not midday sun.

What kind of soil? How do I improve clay soil? You want soil that is somewhat crumbly and brown. To improve clay soil, add organic matter such as soil conditioner. E.g., if planting a 3-gallon shrub work in about 1/3 of a bag of conditioner to the dirt from the hole or spread several inches of conditioner on top of the bed and work it into the top 8” of the soil. Adding some mushroom compost can also be helpful especially for flowers. The Extension Office can provide a soil test kit.

2 to 3 inches of organic mulch helps soil absorb water and maintain moisture while discouraging weeds. Avoid placing mulch within 2 inches of the base of flowers and shrubs. Too much mulch against plants can encourage disease and become a home to damaging pests.

How much water? A rule of thumb is 1 inch per week but it varies by plant and new plants need more water. You can put your finger into the ground to see if the soil seems too dry. It is best to water in the morning and to apply water to the ground (vs the leaves) to avoid diseases. See <https://wayne.ces.ncsu.edu/2022/06/smart-watering-in-the-garden>.

How can I identify a plant? There are several apps available that do a fairly good job of identifying a plant from a photo. You can send a specific plant to the Extension Office for identification.

What plants are deer resistant? See <https://gardening.ces.ncsu.edu/minimizing-deer-damage-in-nc-landscapes>.

How do I handle pests and diseases? There is a good approach called Integrated Pest Management. You can start to learn about this at <https://youtu.be/wr2R6k77EgQ>

What USDA hardiness zone is Hayesville? 7a which means the typical coldest weather is 0 to 5 degrees. FYI Zone 8a would be 10-15 degrees. Higher elevations of Clay County may be 6b at -5 to 0.

How can I find more info on gardening questions and the Master Gardener Volunteers? Visit our webpage at <https://go.ncsu.edu/claycomgs>. You can reach the County Extension Office at <https://clay.ces.ncsu.edu/> 828-389-6305.