Pruning Your Assets

Our grand magnolias and glorious dogwoods provide a very small sampling of the South’s rich natural capital. As with any asset, careful management helps to improve overall health and returns to the investor. Proper pruning is one critical component of landscape management that pays dividends.

February is often mentioned as one of the best months to prune woody plants. While this is often accurate, pruning places stress upon a plant regardless of the time of year. Carefully considering the motives for pruning will help to reduce unnecessary plant stress.

Plants are pruned for five primary reasons: to remove dead, diseased or damaged tissue; to maintain a suitable size; to accentuate aesthetic value; to improve health; or to encourage flowering. The motivation for pruning should not outweigh any other aspect of plant health or value. For example, if pruning a tree to improve driveway access compromises the tree's health, it may be best to remove the tree and replace it with one more suitable for the site.

Once you have clarified why pruning is necessary, identify the plant species that you are working with and research its growth and flowering characteristics. Protecting the next season’s flowers is often a priority. If this goal tops your list, determine when the plant flowers. If the plant flowers in the spring, avoid pruning it until flowering has ended. If the plant flowers in the summer or fall, late-winter pruning is acceptable.

Improving plant health is sometimes a significant concern. In this case, identify the plant’s general category: deciduous (loses leaves in the winter), narrow-leaved evergreen (needle- or scale-like foliage) or broad-leaved evergreen (all remaining foliage types). Each of these groups can have very different pruning requirements.

Deciduous plants and broad-leaved evergreens are best pruned in spring before the new foliage emerges. Pruning narrow-leaved evergreens requires knowledge about plant growth. For example, loblolly pines have a whorled branching pattern that can be pruned to only an active lateral branch or pinched during spring’s new “candle” growth. Other narrow-leaved evergreens, including junipers, arborvitae, cedars and false cypress, are less picky about the timing but can be damaged or disfigured by heavy pruning.

Proper plant management requires good understanding of why you want to prune and how the plant will respond. Call your Cooperative Extension center for assistance, or see this publication for more information: www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/agpubs/ag-071.pdf

— Bob Filbrun
Smart Gardening — On the cutting edge

Often the phase “on the cutting edge” is used to illustrate that we are staying on top of an issue and looking ahead. In the landscape, “on the cutting edge” should be our guide when it comes to pruning: Stay on top of how your plants are growing, and look ahead to use pruning to each plant’s benefit.

We prune for six main reasons: to improve a plant’s appearance or health, to control the plant’s size, to prevent personal injury or property damage, to train young plants, to influence fruiting and flowering, and to rejuvenate old trees and shrubs. Removing diseased, damaged or dead portions of shrubs and trees helps to speed up the development of callus tissue and can assist in limiting the spread of disease.

We can do our part to limit having to repeatedly and heavily prune a plant by learning what its mature height and width will be before planting it. Select a location that the plant will fit properly when fully developed. For well-traveled walkways, pruning shrubs back from interfering with people passing will help to eliminate injuries to people and plants. Removal of low limbs can also make areas safe when mowing.

For young plants and trees, pruning can be used to create the proper scaffold branches that form the main structure of the canopy. Pruning ensures that plants will develop the best framework of branches as they grow and mature. Pruning stimulates new growth and in turn assists in the development of flower buds. Lastly, pruning is sometimes necessary to get a tree or shrub jump-started into growing again, especially if the plant lacks vigor or has been abandoned.

Knowing why we need to prune also helps us determine when to prune based on the plant’s growth habits. During the winter months, we focus on dormant pruning for fruit trees (apple, pear, plum, peach, nectarine), summer-flowering shrubs (crape myrtle, rose of Sharon, butterfly bush) and ornamental grasses (liriope, mondo grass, pampas grass). Pruning at the end of winter just prior to bud break helps plants escape winter injury and promotes new growth as soon as the environment is favorable. Always keep pruning equipment sharpened and disinfected for the best pruning results.

— Jan McGuinn

Food Production — Pecans in the home garden

Pecans are prized trees here in the South because of the shade and delicious nuts they provide. Most pecan trees have little, if any, trouble providing shade. They do, however, have trouble bearing fruit each year.

Most pecan trees have good years and bad. This has intrigued me and others for years. Researchers in many states have tried to figure this out. Quite frankly, the only answer that makes sense is the weather. In some years, the weather prevents the trees from being pollinated due to freeze damage or wind and rain storms. Any of these weather events can knock the flowers and pollen off trees.

Pecan trees are also susceptible to diseases and insects. Pecan scab fungus is the most common disease. An early season infection can significantly reduce yield and crop quality. It is impractical for homeowners to use fungicides against pecan scab, so you have to tolerate the yield reduction in existing trees. Choose scab-resistant varieties when planting new pecan trees.

The most common and destructive pecan insect is the pecan weevil. Pecan weevils cause two types of damage. The adult weevils feed on immature nuts, causing many to fall to the ground. And the female weevils bore holes into the nuts and deposit eggs.

To control pecan weevils, you must use two control methods. One is sanitation. Each year when the pecans fall to the ground, sweep up all the nuts from the orchard floor and dispose of them. This will prevent the larvae from crawling out and burrowing into the ground to start another life cycle. Insecticide applications to the ground and tree trunks are necessary during August and September when the adult weevils are crawling out of the ground.

— Daniel Shires
Garden Spot — Lake James State Park

Nestled on the shoreline of Lake James is one of the newest parks in our state: the Lake James State Park. Established in 1987, its vast acreage offers a variety of outdoor activities, such as hiking, camping, fishing and boating. Wildflower enthusiasts will enjoy walking the trails bordered by an abundance of native plants, including yellow lady-slipper orchids, Indian pipes, flame azaleas and more. Wildlife is also plentiful, with waterbirds, deer, foxes and mink, just to name a few, making the park their home. Steep pine, hardwood and hemlock ridges make up the topography of the park, and the lake’s clear waters make Lake James State Park a picturesque destination in any season.

Lake James was named for James B. Duke, founder of Duke Power Company. The 6,510-acre lake was built between 1916 and 1923 and has been a hydroelectric unit for Duke Power since the early 1900s.

The park is open year-round. Hours fluctuate according to the season. The swim area is open May 1 to September 30 from 10:00 AM until 6:00 PM. Walk-in campsites (with no electricity) are available, and restroom and shower facilities are nearby. The camping areas include sites for people with disabilities, and reservations are strongly advised. Canoe rentals are also available at the park.

If you would like more information about Lake James State Park, call (919) 733.4181 or visit parkinfo@ncmail.net.

— Donna Teasley

Environmental Stewardship — Sound timber management

In this age of living green, folks are often outraged by timber harvests occurring nearby. Homeowners often become offended by the aesthetics of such harvests and profoundly declare that timber harvests are harmful to the environment. This perceived harm, however, is not always the case.

Trees are one of our most renewable resources. Unlike the remains of ancient dinosaurs, trees will resume growth and flourish. These resources provide us with many products that make our lives simpler and more comfortable, and proper forest management can enhance our environment.

For forest landowners wanting to market timber, make sure to conduct harvests the right way. Always avoid high grading – selecting the best, most productive trees and leaving behind trees of marginal quality to remain as the next forest and the seed source for future forests. The next harvest will remove these lower-value trees, yield will be reduced, and more acres will be required to meet local demand. While timber harvesting is not bad, accelerated harvesting is not in the best interest of our natural resources and can result in conflict with the growing public demand to manage these resources responsibly.

Timber harvests should always start with a plan. With a written management plan, you can define your objectives and stay on track. Often it is a good idea to seek the advice of a professional forester. A forester can help you develop a plan based on your needs and concerns and can help to assure that your plan is carried out for optimum profit and sustainability.

Your forester can procure bids and recommend professional loggers who are willing and able to accommodate your plans. To find a consulting forester in your area, visit the NC Forest Service homepage (http://ncforestservice.gov) and click the link for “Consulting Foresters.”

— Damon Pollard

Tips & Tasks

Lawn Care
• Keep leaves from collecting on the lawn. Continue mowing as long as grass continues to grow.
• Give the lawn one last application of fertilizer around Thanksgiving. Use a quick-release fertilizer.
• Crabgrass preventer may be applied to cool-season grasses as early as mid February.
• Cool-season grasses may be fertilized as early as February.

Ornamentals
• If frigid weather occurs, cover shrubs with burlap. Use white plastic if protecting from cold wind.
• Hardwood cuttings of some shrubs (such as forsythia, crape myrtle and hydrangea) may be taken.
• Prune shade trees (such as oak, hickory, poplar, beech and sweet gum) in January.
• Use de-icing products that are safe for lawns and plants.
• Prune ornamental grasses and summer-flowering shrubs in February.

Edibles
• Plant 1-year-old asparagus crowns in December.
• Prune established blueberries by cutting back a third of the oldest canes to ground level.
• Prune fruit trees and grape vines in February.
• Prepare gardens for early vegetable crops, such as lettuce, cabbage or broccoli.
• Mulch strawberries with pine needles or wheat or barley straw in December.

— Donna Teasley
**Showstopper — Winter series camellias**

Would you like to grow camellias but fear they can't handle winter weather? Choose varieties from the “winter series.” Thanks to advancements in breeding by William Ackerman of the National Arboretum, camellias are not out of reach for gardeners in the NC mountains. The winter series includes dozens of varieties. The most popular cold-hardy cultivars have the word “winter” in their names — including ‘Winter’s Interlude’, ‘Winter’s Star’, ‘Winter’s Waterlily’ and ‘Winter’s Charm’. Others such as ‘Pink Icicle’ and ‘Snow Flurry’ are equally tough. These cherished southern evergreens can be enjoyed in gardens further west and north in USDA Hardiness Zone 6. Camellias prefer partial shade and well-drained acidic soil. Some cultivars will flower as early as October. Most bloom from November to January when nothing else is in flower. Wow – they have to be showstoppers!

— John Vining

**Edibles — Microgreens**

Microgreens are unique specialty crops grown for garnishes or to add flavor and color in salads and other dishes. Lacking any legal definition, microgreens are vegetable plants harvested once they reach the first-true-leaf stage. Typically the greens are harvested when plants are 2 inches high with the stem, cotyledons and first true leaves still attached. Microgreens are planted densely to maximize production. They can be grown in seeding trays or beds in fine-textured media with good drainage. Little to no fertilizer is required. Depending on the Vegetable variety, most microgreens are harvested one to three weeks after seeding by cutting them with scissors just above the soil line. They are highly perishable and should be refrigerated immediately after harvest. Popular microgreens include radish, cabbage, kale, beet, mustard and Swiss chard.

— Howard Wallace

**Pest Alert — Eastern moles**

The eastern mole causes a lot of anxiety in Carolina lawns. We all know what mole runs or tunnels look like: ridges in your lawn 1½ inches wide. These tunnels can run for tremendous distances. According to Florida Extension specialists, moles can tunnel up to 18 feet an hour! All this tunneling is a search for food. Moles feed on insects, grubs and even earthworms.

Most of the visible damage moles do is from disturbing the roots of grass plants. Because so many of us spend lots of time and money on our lawns, mole damage is, at the least, worrisome. So what can we do? First, decide if the damage is severe enough to warrant control. A single run is not a signal to bombard your soil with a pesticide. Even if you have a single run, the mole may not be feeding on grubs. Another favorite mole food is earthworms. Realize, too, that mole activity is not all negative. Moles help to aerate heavy soils, allowing air, water and humus to penetrate deeper into the soil. They also feed on grubs that feed on roots of grass plants.

If you decide that the damage is unacceptable, there are many ways to manage mole populations. For more information, check out the NC Cooperative Extension wildlife specialists’ management site: www.ces.ncsu.edu/nreos/wild/wildlife/animals/mammals/moles.htm

— Jeff Rieves

**Sustainability**

Build and Maintain Healthy Soil

The secret to gardening success is in the soil. Many areas where we garden are deficient in nutrients, stripped of topsoil and compacted. Simply digging a hole and sticking a plant in it usually results in failure. Learn what your soil needs through soil testing. Find out how at your local NC Cooperative Extension center. Test results will tell you if lime or nutrients are needed and in what quantities. No matter what you are growing (flowers, fruit, lawn, shrubs, trees or vegetables), plants will do better grouped in beds of well-prepared soil. Dig or till the soil 6 inches deep, add 2 to 3 inches of compost and work the compost in. Add a couple of inches of organic mulch after planting and when the mulch thins to stabilize soil, prevent weeds, feed the soil and conserve water.

— Danny Lauderdale

**Around the State**

**Extension Gardener** provides timely, research-based horticultural information. We publish four issues per year. Send comments about Extension Gardener to Editor and Team Leader Lucy Bradley, Ph.D., Extension Specialist, Urban Horticulture Box 7609, NC State University Raleigh, NC 27695-7609

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http://extensiongardener.ncsu.edu

**Urban Horticulture**

Lucy Bradley, Editor and Team Leader

We publish four issues per year. Send comments about research-based horticultural information.
January Garden Calendar

Plants in Flower
- Japonica Camellia, Wintersweet, Daphne Odora, January Jasmine, Lenten-Rose (Helleborus)

Planting
- None

Pruning
- Prune broken and undesired limbs on your shade trees.
- Remove "weed" or undesirable trees from your landscape.

Spraying
- None

Lawn Care
- Keep tree leaves from collecting on your lawn.

Propagation
- Hardwood cuttings of many landscape plants like Forsythia (Yellow Bells), Flowering Quince, Weigela, Crape Myrtle, Juniper, Spirea, and Hydrangea can be taken this month.

Specific Chores
- Do not forget to care for holiday house plants like Poinsettia, Amaryllis, Christmas Cactus, Gloxinia, and Cyclamen.
- Order your small fruit plants like Strawberry, Blueberry, and Blackberry for a mid-March planting.
- Study your home landscape to see what additions or improvements can be added to your yard.
- Visit the local public library for landscape and garden information.
- Prepare a spot in the vegetable garden for February vegetables like English Peas, Cabbage, Carrots, Onions, Irish Potatoes, Radishes, Rutabagas, Spinach, and Turnips.
- Study your seed catalogs and check for the All-American selections of flowers and vegetables.
- Order fruit trees, if not done last fall.
- Contact the Extension Center to find out the recommended small fruit varieties.
February Garden Calendar

Plants in Flower
- Japonica Camellia, Wintersweet, Breath-of-Spring (Winter Honeysuckle), Daphne Odora, January Jasmine, Lenten-Rose (Helleborus), Trailing Arbutus, Crocus, and Violets.

Planting
- First week in February start Broccoli, Cabbage, and Cauliflower plants inside your home.
- Plant English Peas, Onions, Radishes, Rutabagas, and Turnips.
- Plant Asparagus crowns when soil is dry enough to work.

Pruning
- Prune all fruit trees (Apple, Cherry, Nectarine, Peach, Pear, and Plum).
- Prune Muscadine and Bunch Grape vines this month.
- Trim ornamental grasses like Liriope, Mondo Grass, and Pampass Grass.
- Cut back any overgrown shrubs. Severe pruning should be done this month.
- All summer flowering plants like Crape Myrtle, Rose-of-Sharon, Eleagnus, and Butterfly Bush should be pruned. Prune Camellias after they finish flowering.

Spraying
- Peach and Nectarine trees need to be sprayed with a fungicide to prevent leaf curl.
- After pruning, spray all fruit trees with dormant oil to help eliminate some insects.

Lawn Care
- Cool season lawns like Tall Fescue should be fertilized. Follow soil test results.
- Control Wild Onion in your lawn with spot sprays of a recommended herbicide.

Propagation
- Divide perennials like Daylily and Shasta Daisy when the ground is dry enough.
- Hardwood cuttings of many landscape plants like Crape Myrtle, Flowering Quince, Forsythia, Hydrangea, Juniper, Spirae, and Weigela can be taken this month.

Specific Chores
- Order flowers for your sweetheart - Happy Valentine's Day!
- Develop a vegetable and landscape plan for your home grounds.
March Garden Calendar

Plants in Flower

Fertilizing
- Fertilize your important shade trees.
- Fertilize Asparagus beds early in March before spear growth begins.
- Ponds should be fertilized starting this month and continuing through October.
- Before planting your vegetables, fertilize your garden as recommended by your soil test results. Lime should have been applied in the autumn. If not, apply the recommended amount of lime.

Planting
- Plant a tree for Arbor Day! Arbor Day is always the first Friday after March 15.
- Plant your small fruit plants, grape vines and fruit trees before the buds break.
- March is a good month to transplant trees and shrubs.
- New shrubs and ground covers can be planted the entire month of March. Be sure to follow your planting plan.
- Plant seeds of the following perennials: Columbine, Hollyhock, Coreopsis, Daisy, and Phlox. Sweet William can also be planted this month.
- New rose bushes can be planted this month.
- Plants of Broccoli, Cabbage, and Cauliflower should be set out in the garden in mid-March.
- The following vegetables can be planted this month: Beets, Carrots, Chinese Cabbage, Kale, Kohlrabi, Lettuce, Swiss Chard, and Turnip.
- Start any annual flowers inside your home that are not commercially available in early March.

Pruning
- Prune spring flowering plants like Forsythia (Yellow Bells), Spirea, Breath-of-Spring (Winter Honeysuckle), and Flowering Quince after the flowers fade.
- Prune roses before buds break.
- Prune shrubs like Abelia, Mahonia, and Nandina this month if needed.
- Pick off faded flowers of Pansy and Daffodil. Pansies will flower longer if old flowers are removed.

Spraying
- Check the following landscape shrubs for the following insect pests: Camellia (Tea Scale), Euonymus (Scale), Juniper (Spider Mites), and Hybrid Rhododendron (Borer).
- Start your rose spray program just prior to bud break.
- Spray Iris beds for Iris Borers starting in mid-March.
- Spray your Apple and Pear trees with streptomycin for control of Fireblight. During bloom Pears MUST be sprayed.

Lawn Care
- Apply Crabgrass herbicides to your lawn this month to help control Crabgrass in the turf.
- Mow your Tall Fescue lawn as needed.

Propagation
- Continue to divide perennials like Daylily, Shasta Daisy, Gaillardia, and Coreopsis this month. Cannas can also be divided in May.

Specific Chores
- Check garden supplies like fertilizer, insecticides and fungicides to see if you have adequate amounts.
- Check all garden equipment, lawn mowers, tillers, hedge trimmers, tools, hoses, and sprayers to see if they are in working order before they are needed.
- Be certain that old plantings of perennials like Peony, Hollyhock, and Phlox are clean of last season's growth.
Take Action Against Radon – A Silent Killer

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that is invisible, odorless, and tasteless. Radon is released harmlessly from the ground into outdoor air, but it can accumulate and reach harmful levels when trapped in homes and buildings.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that radon is responsible for more than 21,000 lung cancer deaths per year in the United States. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S. after smoking and the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers. Since radon does not have an odor and is invisible, people tend to downplay the health effects and ignore the possibility that there might be a silent killer within the walls of their home.

McDowell County has been designated as a Zone 1 County by the US Environmental Protection Agency, which means the average home will test over 4 picocuries per liter (pCi/L), the level at which it is recommended that you fix your home. Houses in the same neighborhood can have very different levels, so every home should be tested. Testing homes for radon is simple and inexpensive. Radon test kits can be purchased at local hardware and home improvement stores, directly from radon testing companies, or are available for free during January from the NC Radon Program. Should your home be found to have elevated levels of radon, the problem can be fixed by qualified contractors for a cost similar to that of many other home repairs. In our area, the cost can be from $1,000 to $2,500 depending on the home.

The NC Radon Program urges residents to take action during this year’s National Radon Action Month by testing their homes for radon. Radon poses a serious threat to our community’s health, but there is a straightforward solution.

For more information on radon and to receive your FREE radon test kit, please contact, Kristin Mart at 652-7874
Or visit the NC Radon Program’s website at www.ncradon.org

Foothills Pilot Plant Now Open

Foothills Pilot Plant is now able to accept scheduling for processing of chickens and turkeys under USDA inspection, for delivery after January 15, 2012. The facility is already authorized to process rabbits under FDA inspection.

To learn more or to schedule processing, please contact our general manager Dr. Pal Manhiani at 828-803-2717, or by email at foothillspilotplant@gmail.com.

For a list of processing rates, please visit the FAQ section on the website at www.foothillspilotplant.com.
Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) Certification Training
Tuesday, February 28, 2012
McDowell County Extension Center
6:00 pm - 8:15 pm
$15 fee for NC Cattlemen’s Association members
$40 fee for non-members
(Fees will be accepted at the meeting)

MUST RSVP by calling 652-7874 by Friday, February 17

The purpose of this training is to certify beef producers in best management practices that deal with producing high-quality cattle. As an educational program, BQA helps producers identify management processes that can be improved. BQA also reflects a positive public image and instills consumer confidence in the beef industry. BQA is a program of the NC Cattlemen’s Association. They provide the educational materials and perform the required clerical work to record all BQA certified producers.

Growing Shiitake Mushrooms
A workshop on Growing Shiitake Mushrooms is scheduled for Saturday, January 28 at 1:00 pm at the McDowell Agricultural Center, Ag Services Drive, Marion.

Mushroom cultivation is something you can do in your own backyard. The workshop includes shiitake mushroom spawn for you to get started. There is a registration fee of $15/$20 for couples. (Spaces are limited)

Make checks payable to: McDowell Cooperative Extension. Mail to McDowell Cooperative Extension, 60 East Court Street, Marion, NC 28752. Call Molly Sandfoss or Jane McDaniel at 828-652-8104 with questions. Must register by January 10.

Annual McDowell Cattlemen’s Association Meeting
(Meal sponsored by Farm Bureau- McDowell)
Monday January 30, 2012 6:00 pm
Glenwood Ruritan Building (behind Glenwood Fire Department)

The program will be presented by Mr. Bryan Blinson, Executive Director of the NC Cattlemen’s Association. Bryan will give us an update on the many activities of the NC Cattlemen’s Association.

MUST RSVP by Wednesday, January 25th
Would you like to learn more about all aspects of gardening and landscaping and then use that knowledge to help others?

*If the answer is yes,*

**The Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program Is for YOU**

Applicants for the program should have some experience with gardening, a willingness to learn and a desire to share their knowledge with others.

The Master Gardener Training will include 13 three hour sessions
That will begin in late winter/early spring.

The cost for the Master Gardener Program will be $100.00 plus 40 hours of volunteer time.
For more information or to register for this program please call the Cooperative Extension Service at 652-8104.