“Every gardener knows that under the cloak of winter lies a miracle... a seed waiting to sprout, a bulb opening to the light, a bud straining to unfurl. And the anticipation nurtures our dream.”

- Barbara Winkler

Organic Growers School

The 15th Annual Organic Growers School is taking place Saturday, March 8 at Blue Ridge Community College near Flat Rock.

The event provides practical region-appropriate organic growing and permaculture workshops, as well as a seed exchange and trade show.

This year’s school offers 70 different class sessions plus several half-day hands-on workshops. Cost: $40 if you pre-register by Feb. 28, or $55 after February. You can now download the class schedule and even register online at:

www.organicgrowersschool.org

Normal February Weather

Weather Averages (1895 – 2008)

For Central and Southern Mountains

Courtesy of the National Climatic Data Center

Normal February Average High 45.9°F
Normal February Average Low 25.8°F
Normal February Precipitation 4.06”

Hours of Daylight for Asheville, NC

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<th>Sunrise</th>
<th>Sunset</th>
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<td>Feb. 1</td>
<td>7:30 am</td>
<td>5:56 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 29</td>
<td>7:01 am</td>
<td>6:23 pm</td>
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**CHORES FOR FEBRUARY**

**LAWNS**
- Think Spring! This is the month for the spring application of slow-release fertilizer to the lawn.
- If you have bare spots that did not recover from the drought, late February or early March would be a good time to put down grass seed.
- Check the condition of the lawn mower if not done in the fall. You could be needing it any day so make sure it is tuned and sharpened before it’s too late.

**ORNAMENTALS**
- If overgrown shrubs need renovation, do severe pruning in late February or March.
- When removing wayward branches from shade trees, make correct pruning cuts at the branch collar. **DO NOT TOP TREES!** For information on correct pruning see: [http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-602.html](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-602.html).
- Try forcing some blooming branches to brighten winter days. Look for swelling flower buds on winter honeysuckle, viburnums, winter daphne, spirea, forsythia, quince or fruit trees.
- House plants could use some TLC by now. Take them to the sink or shower and give them a good bath. Cut back leggy stems and check for tiny insect pests.
- Get outdoors. Winter days can bring wonderful surprises – crocus, early daffodils, hellebores or lungworts.

**FRUITS**
- Prune grape vines. Sap will probably drip from cut stems during warm spells, but this is not harmful.
- Check and repair trellises for grape vines and blackberries.
- Mature apple and pear trees can be pruned, but do not prune young fruit trees, peaches or plums before March.
- The Extension office has videos available for loan on pruning grape vines, brambles, blueberries and apple trees.

**VEGETABLES**
- Start planning this year’s garden. Sketch the garden and fill in the rows for rotating crops and planning space.
- Check last year’s notes. Which varieties performed well and which are not worth planting again? Start shopping for seeds at garden centers and seed catalogs.
- Don’t let the calendar deter you from planting some vegetables. English and edible-pod peas, spinach, kale, onions and a few other cold hardy crops can be planted in late February through March.
- Plant an asparagus bed.
- Mow cover crops and turn under if the soil is not too wet to work.

**OTHER**
- Bluebirds and some other song birds will be scouting for nesting sites this month. Clean out old bird houses and put up new ones.
- Use a nice winter day to clean out the garden storage area. Clean and sharpen pruning tools. Get the tiller tuned up.
**SPOTLIGHT: HELLEBORES**

Just when spring seems farthest away along come the Hellebores. The most common member of the Hellborus family is the Lenten Rose, *Helleborus orientalis*. The evergreen foliage of Lenten Rose adds a bold texture to the woodland garden. Rising from a central crown, the leaves are large, dark green, glossy and divided into 5 to 9 segments. Plants stand 12 to 18 inches tall and up to 2 feet across. The unique flowers of Lenten Rose appear in February, even through layers of mountain snow. The nodding, 5 petaled cups can range in color from cream to light green to pinkish brown, usually with maroon speckling. The flowers, which last several weeks, are followed by flower-like seed pods.

Christmas Rose, *H. Niger*, is quite similar in appearance to its cousin. Flowers may not make it in time for Christmas (although this year they certainly did), but will probably be up by January. They are usually creamy white, changing to pink with age. The foliage is not as dark and glossy as Lenten Rose, but is otherwise similar. *H.niger* has a reputation for being more temperamental to grow.

Plant all Hellebores in at least partial shade. They will perform best in a woodland setting with moist, well drained soil amended with plenty of compost. Lime will probably also be appropriate as they prefer neutral to slightly alkaline soil. Once established they are more drought tolerant than most woodland plants.

Hellebores require very little care, though the appearance will be improved by removing the old, ragged leaves just before the flowers emerge. If seed pods are left, eventually seedlings will appear around the garden. These small plants can be moved and will probably flower in 3 to 4 years. Mature plants seem to resent being moved, but can be carefully divided in the fall.

**WNC CLEAN STREAMS**

February 26, 2008
9:00 am – 4:30 pm
Sponsored by NC Cooperative Extension at The North Carolina Arboretum

Soil erosion, pesticides, fertilizers, household products and other contaminants find their way into our streams and water supplies. There are steps that home owners and landscape professionals can take to preserve and protect our mountain water resources. The registration fee of $30 includes materials and lunch. For registration information contact Buncombe County Cooperative Extension: 255-5522. Registration deadline is February 15.

**Commercial Landscapers & Turfgrass Managers**

Water Quality Problems
Watersheds, River Basins & Pollution Movement
Sources of Nutrients
BMPs to reduce Nutrients, Sediments, and Soil Testing for Nutrient Management
Turfgrass Management for Protecting Water Quality

- Examples of Best Practices at the NC Arboretum
- Mini Trade Show of Water Quality products and services

**Residential Homeowners**

Maintaining a Water Wise Landscape
Maintaining a Water Wise Home
Raingardens
Xeriscaping – Planning Wise Water Management
All-American Selections

Each year the All-American Selections committee tests many new varieties of flowers and vegetables in trial gardens all over the US and Canada. Winners are selected based on unique or improved qualities and their performance across the many locations. Here are the 2008 introductions.

**Osteospermum ‘Asti White’**
produces pure white daisy flowers, 2 to 2½ inches across, with blue centers. The uniform plants thrive in a sunny garden, reaching about 17 to 20 inches tall and wide.

**Viola ‘Skippy XL Plum-Gold’**
produces large numbers of small, 1.5 inch, flowers of plum with sunny gold faces. The petite plants growing 6 to 8 inches tall and wide are highly recommended for combination planters.

**Eggplant ‘Hansel’**
is a miniature eggplant, producing finger-sized clusters of fruit. The strong plant, reaching less than three feet, produces clusters of three to six fruit.

Spring Garden School

The Spring Garden School, presented by Extension Master Gardener volunteers of Buncombe County will be offered at the Folk Art Center on the Blue Ridge Parkway on Saturday, March 1. The fee is $5 per morning or afternoon session, $10 all day. You must preregister by sending in your check made out to : Master Gardener Project Fund, 94 Coxe Ave., Asheville, NC 28801. Sign up for the morning or afternoon session or both.

9:15 – 9:40  Morning Check in and Registration

9:45 – 12:20  **Right Plant in the Right Place**: Learn how to decide what are the best plants for your site.

**Plant it Right**: Learn to analyze your soil, proper soil preparation, and how to plant correctly.

**Common Problems**: Learn to identify some common plant diseases, insects and weeds of our area and what to do next.

1:00 – 1:20  Afternoon Only Check in and Registration

1:25 – 4:15  **Evaluating Difficult Sites**: What to do with the more difficult sites? Slope stabilization, managing storm water runoff; and fire proofing your landscape.

**Nifty Natives**: The who, what, when and why of WNC native plants.

**Weekend Gardener**: Learn great tips for reducing your landscape maintenance.
**TREES AVAILABLE**

The Buncombe Soil and Water Conservation District will be holding its annual tree seedling sale February 28 – March 1, at Jesse Israel and Sons Garden Center. The sale will be 1:00 to 4:30 pm on Thursday and 9:00 am to 4:30 pm on Friday and Saturday. Seedlings will be available on a first-come basis until they run out. White pine seedlings are 25 cents each and hardwoods are 75 cents each. Species available are:

- Eastern White Pine
- Black Walnut
- Crabapple
- Dogwood, Flowering
- Red Maple
- Common Persimmon
- White Ash
- Wild Plum
- Northern Red Oak
- White Oak
- Black Cherry

For more information call: Soil and Water Conservation at 250-4785

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**Speakers Bureau**

Need someone to speak to your club or organization? The Extension Master Gardener Speakers’ Bureau offers a number of garden related topics. There is no fee for this educational service. For further information on available programs, contact the Buncombe County Cooperative Extension office at 255-5522.

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The *Mountain Gardener* is a newsletter produced by the Buncombe County Center of North Carolina Cooperative Extension. The purpose of this newsletter is to inform and educate Buncombe County residents about issues related to home lawns and gardens.

**Editor:**

**Linda G. Blue**

Linda G. Blue

*Extension Agent – Agriculture – Urban Horticulture*

Check out Buncombe County Center’s website at…..

[http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu](http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu)
COMING EVENTS

Feb. 12  Growing in the Mountains: “Growing Transplants”, Presented by Extension Master Gardeners at The North Carolina Arboretum, 10:00 – 11:00 am, Free admission, no pre-registration.

Feb. 26- March 11  Basic Home Maintenance Class, NC Cooperative Extension, Buncombe County Center, Five classes, Tues. and Thurs. nights, 5:30 – 7:30 pm, $20, pre-registration required, call 255-5522.

March 1  Spring Garden School, presented by Extension Master Gardeners at the Folk Art Center, Blue Ridge Parkway, Asheville, $5 half day, pre-registration required, call 255-5522.

March 8  15th Annual Organic Growers School, Blue Ridge Community College, Flat Rock, NC – Early registration deadline is Feb. 28.  www.organicgrowersschool.org

Individuals with disabilities who would like to participate in any program mentioned in this newsletter, but who need special assistance to do so, should call the Extension Center at 828-255-5522 at least five days prior to the event.