“Flowers always make people better, happier and more helpful; they are sunshine, food and medicine to the soul.”

- Luther Burbank

Organic Growers School

The 14th Annual Organic Growers School takes place Saturday, March 10 at the 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 40 different class sessions plus several half-day hands-on workshops. Cost: $40 (pre-register by March 1) or $60 (after March 1 and day of school). You can now download the class schedule and even register online at:

http://www.organicgrowersschool.org/

Normal February Weather

Weather Averages (1895 – 2007)
For Central and Southern Mountains

Courtesy of the National Climatic Data Center, NOAA

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Sunrise</th>
<th>Sunset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 1</td>
<td>7:30 am</td>
<td>5:56 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 28</td>
<td>7:02 am</td>
<td>6:23 pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inside:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garden Chores For February</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spotlight: Green Giant Arborvitae</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All America Selections</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Plants For Air Quality</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crabgrass Control</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemlock Woolly Adelgid</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speakers Bureau</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree Seedlings Available</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got Voles?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming Events</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHORES FOR FEBRUARY

LAWNS

- Think spring! This is the month for the spring application of slow-release fertilizer to the lawn.
- Late February or early March is a good time to plant seeds for fescue and bluegrass lawns.
- Keep in mind, if you put down grass seed now you will not be able to use “crabgrass preventer” this season as it will damage the new grass.
- Check the condition of the lawn mower if not done this fall. You could need it any day so make sure it is tuned up and the blade sharpened before it’s too late.

ORNAMENTALS

- Do not prune spring blooming shrubs if you care about having flowers this spring.
- If overgrown shrubs need renovation, do severe pruning in late February or March.
- Trim back the leaves of liriope and mondo grass before new growth starts.
- 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.
- House plants will begin growing more with lengthening days so you can start fertilizing again.
- This could also be a good time to repot house plants that have become potbound.
- Brighten your home with a new house plant. Before purchase check carefully for tiny insects, especially spider mites and whiteflies.

FRUITS

- Finish pruning blackberries if not done in the fall.
- Also finish pruning grape vines and making repairs to trellises.
- Do not prune young fruit trees, peaches or plums before March. Established apple and pear trees should tolerate early pruning.
- The Extension Office has video tapes available for loan on pruning grape vines, blueberries and fruit trees.

VEGETABLES

- Let the planting begin! English and edible-pod peas, spinach, kale, onions and a few other cold hardy crops can be planted in late February through March.
- Lettuce and other salad greens can be planted but you will want to have row cover fabric ready for very cold nights.
- Plants growing in cold frames or green houses need attention. Ventilate on sunny afternoons to avoid over-heating. Keep an eye out for insects.
- 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.

Recommendations for the use of chemicals are included in this publication as a convenience to the reader. The use of brand names and any mention or listing of commercial products or services in this publication does not imply endorsement by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension nor discrimination against similar products or services not mentioned. Individuals who use chemicals are responsible for ensuring that the intended use complies with current regulations and conforms to the product label. Be sure to obtain current information about usage and examine a current product label before applying any chemical. For assistance, contact an agent of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension.
SPOTLIGHT: ‘GREEN GIANT’ ARBORVITAE

If you’ve seen enough Leyland Cypress but need a large evergreen with similar appearance, consider ‘Green Giant’ Arborvitae. *Thuja plicata* ‘Green Giant’ is a vigorously growing, pyramidal evergreen with rich green color.

Mature specimens of ‘Green Giant’ can grow to 40 feet tall with an 8 to 15 foot spread, so be sure to give them plenty of room. It makes a good screening hedge or single specimen planting. If you need something smaller, many lower growing cultivars of arborvitae are available and make good landscape additions.

Arborvitae is rarely troubled by significant insect pest or disease problems, except occasionally bagworms. It tolerates a wide range of soil types and hardiness zones. It will tolerate partial shade, but best growth and dense form will occur in full sun with adequate soil moisture. Growth rates of 2 to 4 feet per year are typical in good growing conditions.

ALL-AMERICA SELECTIONS

Each year the All-America 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 2007 introductions.

**Pepper ‘Holy Molé’** is a hybrid pasilla type pepper, used in making molé sauce. Immature green peppers are 7 to 9 inches long, mature fruit will turn a dark chocolate color.

**Vinca ‘Pacifica Burgundy Halo’** sports a burgundy flower with a large white center. Like other vinca varieties, in full sun the plant will be a compact one foot tall and is very heat and drought tolerant.

**Petunia ‘Opera Supreme Pink Morn’** is a trailing petunia with flowers described as “iridescent pink, shading to creamy white in the center with a yellow throat and silvery shine that causes the blooms to shimmer”. Plants grow 3 feet long and flower continually.

**Celosia ‘Fresh Look Gold’** forms a compact one foot plant topped with golden plumes all summer. The flowers are said not to brown and therefore do not need to be deadheaded. Another good plant for low maintenance color all summer.

HOUSE PLANTS FOR AIR QUALITY

In recent years, homes have been built to be more energy efficient. This means that while keeping the heat from escaping, we are also allowing indoor air pollutants to build up. Fortunately if you enjoy growing house plants they can provide health benefits, in addition to the psychological ones, by removing some of the harmful materials from the indoor air.

Some plants have been found to be better than others at filtering pollutants. For example, English ivy (*Hedera helix*) is particularly good at removing benzene from the air. Peace lily (*Spathiphyllum*) removes a lot of trichloroethylene, and spider plants (*Chlorophytum*) filters large percentages of formaldehyde and carbon monoxide.
CRABGRASS CONTROL

A thick healthy lawn, mowed at 3 inches, will prevent most crabgrass seedlings from becoming established. But those who insist on a perfect lawn may want to use an herbicide for crabgrass control. The key to using these products is to remember that they work by preventing seed from germinating. That means that if you don’t apply the herbicide until after the seeds have already germinated, you won’t get much control. Crabgrass seed begins to germinate when the soil temperature reaches about 55 degrees, but the seeds do not germinate all at once. For best crabgrass control, NC State University specialists suggest splitting the herbicide application in half. Apply half of the recommended rate when the Forsythias bloom (mid to late March). Apply the other half in 6 to 8 weeks.

It is also important to note that crabgrass preventers should not be used on grass seeded after October 1. Many of these products will damage young grass that is not yet well established. Read the label to be sure the product can be used safely on your lawn.

HEMLOCK WOOLLY ADELGID

February would be a good month to check hemlock trees for woolly adelgid infestation. With March and April being the best time of year to treat, this gives you time to evaluate your trees and decide what approach to take.

HWA only affects hemlock trees. Look for small wads of white cottony material along the twigs, at the base of the needles. There is no need to treat trees that are not affected.

If trees are small enough to spray, horticultural oil or insecticidal soap can do a good job if you get good spray coverage to coat all the insects. Do not allow spray to drift onto surface water.

Large trees may be treated with systemic insecticides containing imidacloprid (Merit, Bayer Advance Garden Tree and Shrub Insect Control). If the tree is not close to a stream, a soil drench can be applied by digging a shallow trench one foot from the trunk. Follow label directions carefully for calculating mixing and application rates.

Trees that can not be treated with a soil drench because of proximity to a stream or sloping or rocky soil can be treated by trunk injections. This method would need to be handled by a professional arborist or other licensed pesticide applicator.

For more information on Hemlock Woolly Adelgids:


SPEAKERS BUREAU

Need someone to speak to your club or organization? The Extension Master Gardeners’ 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.
TREE SEEDLINGS AVAILABLE

The Buncombe Soil and Water Conservation District will be holding their annual tree seedling sale March 2nd and 3rd at Jesse Israel and Sons Garden Center. White pine seedlings are 25 cents each and hardwoods are 75 cents. It is recommended that you pre-order hardwoods no later than February 20th, as they usually sell out. Hardwood varieties available are:

- Black Walnut
- Persimmon
- Crabapple
- White Oak
- Northern Red
- Red Maple
- Green Ash
- White Ash
- Wild Plum
- White Pine

You can find an order form at:

http://intranet.buncombecounty.org/common/soil/SeedlingOrderForm.pdf

Or contact Soil and Water at: 250-4785.

GOT VOLES?

“Ask A Gardener”, by Glenn Palmer, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Q: Some of our spring bulbs did not come up and it appears something has been eating them. The stems of some nearby junipers have also been damaged. We’ve been told that we may have voles. What can we do about them?

A: There are two species of voles in our area, both about the size of a field mouse. Meadow voles live and feed above ground in areas where grasses, other low plants or even mulch provide cover. The pine voles make shallow tunnels beneath the surface. Both are vegetarians, gnawing roots, bulbs and the stems of plants. (Moles, no relation, make raised tunnels at the surface and eat grubs and worms.)

To see if voles are active in your garden you can use the “apple test”. Place a ½ inch cube of apple under a board or other shelter that is propped up 3 – 4 inches off the ground so that the animal can get underneath. You might want to place several of these test stations around your garden. If the apple’s gone after several days you can use a snap-type mouse trap baited with apple or peanut butter in the same location. For more details on identifying and trapping voles contact the Buncombe County Extension office for the leaflet “Voles in Horticultural Plantings.”

Alternatively there is a rodenticide available called Rozol. However it can only be used for pine voles as it must be placed down in their tunnels, out of reach of other animals. After several weeks of baiting you can use the apple test to see if voles are still present.

Still another solution for pine voles is to plant bulbs, hostas and other susceptible plants in products called Permatill or Vole Bloc. These can be likened to sharp pebbles and are tilled into the soil around vulnerable plants to discourage underground vole activity.
COMING EVENTS

February 10

Pruning Workshop, 10:00am – 12noon at Botanical Gardens at Asheville, on W.T. Weaver Blvd., Asheville. $5.00 members, $8.00 nonmembers. Call 252-5190.

February 13

Gardening In The Mountains “Backyard Composting”.
Presented by Extension Master Gardeners at The North Carolina Arboretum. 10:00am. Free admission, no pre-registration.

February 28 – March 4

Southern Spring Show, Charlotte Merchandise Mart, Charlotte, NC. Look for Extensions’ Successful Gardener Learning Center staffed by Extension horticulture agents and Master Gardener volunteers.

February 6 – 20

Basic Home Maintenance Course at the North Carolina Cooperative Extension. Classes held Tuesdays and Thursdays. For more information or to register call 255-5522.

March 10

Organic Growers School at Blue Ridge Community College, Flat Rock, NC. For more information and to register: http://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.