“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

Don’t Top Trees!
A lot of tree pruning gets done during the winter months. It is often easier to get the job done when the leaves are out of the way. There is not a problem with that as long as you are removing a branch correctly and not topping the tree.

Reasons not to top a tree:
1. The wounds created by topping do not heal and eventually decay enters the tree.
2. A topped branch will either die, or produce multiple sprouts which quickly grow back thicker and weaker than the original branches.
3. When a large portion of the crown is removed a like portion of the roots will die.
4. Topped trees eventually become hazardous.
5. It’s ugly.

For information on correct branch removal, see the leaflet on tree pruning:
Pruning Trees, Flushcuts and Wound Dressing

Normal January Weather
Weather Averages (1895 – 2007)
For Central and Southern Mountains
Courtesy of the National Climatic Data Center, NOAA

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

Hours of Daylight for Asheville, NC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Sunrise</th>
<th>Sunset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 1</td>
<td>7:39 am</td>
<td>5:26 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 31</td>
<td>7:31 am</td>
<td>5:55 pm</td>
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Inside:

Garden Chores For January 2
Just A Mouse Click Away 2
Spotlight: American Holly 3
Keep The Tree Fresh 3
Caring For The Christmas Tree 3
Mountain Gardener Index 2006 4
Propagating House Plants 4
Call Before You Dig 5
Become A Beekeeper 5
Basic Home Maintenance 5
Coming Events 6
CHORES FOR JANUARY

LAWNS

- This is usually a month to take a break from lawn chores. Spring fertilizer is normally applied to cool season lawns in February, but if we have some mild weather it will not hurt the lawn to do it in January instead.

ORNAMENTALS

- Take stem cuttings from house plants for rooting.
- Try your hand at air-layering plants like ficus trees, dieffenbachia, dracaena and rubber trees.
- Evergreen shrubs can be pruned.
- Most trees and shrubs can be planted if the ground is not frozen or too muddy.
- Fertilize shade trees if they have not been growing well.
- Shade trees benefit from having mulch in the area under the branch spread.
- Liriope and ornamental grasses can be cut back if desired.
- Avoid pruning spring blooming shrubs as this will remove the spring flowers.
- Check house plants for insects. Look carefully at the bottom side of leaves.

FRUITS

- Prune grape vines.
- Do not prune fruit trees until March.

VEGETABLES

- Pull winter weeds and apply fresh mulch to the asparagus bed.
- Want to plant asparagus? Order crowns now and start double digging a bed.
- If the weather is nice and the soil is in good condition, turn a bed for February planting of peas and kale.
- Start your garden plan on paper as you browse the garden catalogs. This will help prevent ordering more than you have room to plant.
- A leaflet on Home Vegetable Gardening can be found at our web site at: buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu

OTHER

- Clean out bird houses and put up new ones. Bluebirds and some other songbirds start scouting for spring nest boxes in February.
- Get the lawn mower and other equipment serviced before it is needed in the spring.

Just A Mouse Click Away

If cabin fever leaves you yearning for gardening information, there is a lot available, just a couple of mouse clicks away. Go to the Buncombe County Cooperative Extension web page at buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu. The Lawn and Garden link will bring you in touch with many publications from NC State University. Or use the search option if you are looking for something specific.

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: AMERICAN HOLLY

What plant more represents the holiday season than American holly? Evergreen leaves and red berries have made this plant a tradition for winter decorating. Although we occasionally see beautiful old specimens in landscapes, it is not that often used in modern landscape designs. The most likely reason for this is that it grows fairly slowly and other hybrid hollies are faster and easier to grow in nurseries.

Wild holly trees are quite variable in characteristics such as leaf color and plant form. A holly tree is either male or female. Only the female produces the coveted berries, and a wild seedling tree may not produce berries until it is too large to move. But don’t let all this discourage you from planting this beautiful native tree. There are reportedly more than 1,000 named cultivars of *Ilex opaca*. Many of these are selected for characteristics like dark green leaf color, heavy berry production and tree shape. If you want to be different, there are varieties with orange or yellow berries.

To ensure lots of berries, a female tree must have a male tree nearby to provide pollen. In western North Carolina this is usually not a problem, especially in rural areas. If you want to be sure though, you can purchase a male tree for your landscape as well.

American holly will perform well in full sun or partial shade. Don’t worry much about the soil pH, as anywhere between 4.5 and 6.5 will do. Soil should be well-drained though.

Unfortunately, American holly is subject to a number of potential pest and disease problems. None are usually fatal, but can cause the plant to look unsightly for a while. So this may not be the best plant for the formal entrance. Plant it at the edge of the yard where you and the birds can enjoy the winter berries, and still have a supply of holiday greenery.

KEEP THE TREE FRESH

Recent research has confirmed that the best ingredient for keeping the cut Christmas tree from drying out is plain water. Additives have not been found to prolong the needle retention any longer. Follow these suggestions for keeping the tree fresh as long as possible.

Caring For The Cut Christmas Tree

1. Purchase a tree with fresh resilient needles that do not fall off when the tree is bounced.
2. Store the tree outdoors, standing in a bucket of water, until it is brought inside.
3. Re-cut the base of the stem when the tree is brought into the house. A Cut Christmas tree will absorb between 2 pints and one gallon of water per day. Be sure your tree stand is large enough to hold adequate water. Check the water level daily and keep the cut surface covered with water at all times. Once it dries, it will form a seal and will not take up water any more.
4. Avoid exposing the tree to heat sources and warm drafts. Use an anti-transpirant spray to help slow the drying out of the needles.
PROPAGATING HOUSE PLANTS

Many house plants are easily rooted as cuttings. If you have viney things like wandering jew and pathos that make good hanging baskets, this is a good time to get some cuttings started for summer baskets. Among the most easily rooted plants are wandering jew, philodendron, Swedish ivy, English ivy, pathos, purple heart (Setcreasea), Brugmansia, African violet, jade plant, Christmas cactus, hoya, schefflera, and geranium.

Don’t make your cuttings too large – 6 inches or less for most. Rooting usually takes place at a leaf node. So remove the lower one or 2 sets of leaves and place these nodes below the water or soil.

Most of these root most readily in water. I find translucent glass works well. Succulent plants such as jade and Christmas cactus are better rooted in moist potting media. Place cuttings in a bright location with little or no direct sunlight. When roots are a couple of inches long, plants are ready to be potted.
CALL BEFORE YOU DIG

Landscaping projects can involve some major digging – a terrace, retaining wall, drainage lines, even planting a large tree. Before you bring in the trenching or excavating equipment, do you know where all your utility and water lines are? Even a mattock or shovel can sever a cable.

To be on the safe side, public utilities are glad to come out and mark underground utilities. All it takes is one phone call to the North Carolina One Call Center at 1-800-632-4949. Before you call, be prepared with the following information: the name of your subdivision, if you are in one, the nearest cross-street, if there will be any blasting, if you are within ¼ mile of a railroad, when the work will start and what kind of work you are planning.

Allow 48 hours for the utilities to be marked. Note that only the public utilities up to your meters will be marked. They will not locate your private septic lines or the water lines past the meter. Also be aware that the marking may not be exact and they don’t tell you the depth of the lines, so you will need to use caution close to the markings.

You can find more information on the North Carolina One Call Center web page at:

http://www2.ncocc.org/ncocc/homepage.htm

BECOME A BEEKEEPER

If you have ever wanted to learn about keeping bee hives, this is the opportunity. The Buncombe County Bee Club and NC Cooperative Extension will be offering a free 5 session course in beekeeping. There will be opportunities to purchase educational materials and to win a free hive.

The Classes will be held at the Folk Art Center on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Dates are:

- Saturday & Sunday, January 6 & 7, from 1:30 – 4:00
- Saturday & Sunday, January 13 & 14, from 1:30 – 4:00
- Sunday, January 21st from 1:30 – 4:00

To register, go to the web page at: www.wncbees.org, or if you don’t have a computer you may call 255-5522 (North Carolina Cooperative Extension Office).

BASIC HOME MAINTENANCE

The Buncombe County Center of NC Cooperative Extension is offering a 5 session Basic Home Maintenance course. Topics include: saving on your heating and cooling bills, basic plumbing repairs, interior and exterior maintenance, landscape and lawn care, indoor air quality, and more.

Classes will be: Tuesday and Thursday from 5:30 – 7:30pm
On February 6, 8, 13, 15 & 20 (Snow date February 27)

Cost is $20 and includes all materials. Space is limited so pre-registration is necessary. To register, call the Buncombe County Center at 255-5522.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 13</td>
<td><strong>Upper Broad River Watershed Protection Program.</strong> 9:00am – 2:45pm. Lake Lure Municipal Center. For information call: 828-625-9983 ext. 123 or visit the web page at: <a href="http://www.upperbroadriver.org/winter_workshop1.htm">www.upperbroadriver.org/winter_workshop1.htm</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 16 – 20</td>
<td><strong>Green &amp; Growing Show,</strong> Greensboro, NC. For more info: <a href="http://www.ncan.com">www.ncan.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 6 – 21</td>
<td><strong>WNC Bee School 2007,</strong> at The Folk Art Center. For info: <a href="http://www.wncbees.org">www.wncbees.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 6 – 20</td>
<td><strong>Basic Home Maintenance Course</strong> at the North Carolina Cooperative Extension. Classes held Tuesdays and Thursdays. For more information or to register call 255-5522.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 10</td>
<td><strong>Organic Growers School</strong> at Blue Ridge Community College, Flat Rock, NC. For more information and to register: <a href="http://www.organicgrowersschool.org/registration.html">http://www.organicgrowersschool.org/registration.html</a></td>
</tr>
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**LGB:ds**

*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.*