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Contact Us

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Check out Buncombe County Center’s website at:
http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu

Helping gardeners put knowledge to work...

“A house with daffodils in it is a house lit up, whether or no the sun be shining outside.” - A.A. Milne

Gardeners’ Almanacs

If the first thing you look at in the newsletter each month is the list of garden chores, you are in good company. Among the most important things for gardeners to know is what time of year to carry out certain garden activities—fertilizing, planting, pruning, etc.

In addition to this newsletter, another handy reference is our Gardeners’ Almanac. Our Extension Master Gardener volunteers sell this publication as a guide for gardening in Buncombe County. You can pick up a copy at the Extension office for $5.00. Volunteers usually have them available at events like the Saturday Plant Clinics as well.

Normal March Weather

Weather Averages
For Asheville, North Carolina

Normal March Average High  57°F
Normal March Average Low   35°F
Normal March Precipitation 4.0”

Hours of Daylight for Asheville, NC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sunrise</th>
<th>Sunset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 1</td>
<td>7:00 am</td>
<td>6:24 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 31</td>
<td>7:18 am</td>
<td>7:50 pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Persons with disabilities and persons with limited English proficiency may request accommodations to participate in activities mentioned in this newsletter. Please contact Linda Blue at 828-255-5522 during business hours at least 3 days prior to the event to discuss accommodations.
Garden Chores for March

Lawns

• It is nearly too late for the spring fertilizer application. Slow release nitrogen should be applied by the first week of March. A quickly released material, such as 10-10-10, can be used up until the end of March.
• If broadleaf (non-grass) weeds are present, apply a broadleaf herbicide such as 2-4, D or MCPP, when weeds are growing.
• If you plan to use a pre-emergent herbicide to prevent crabgrass or other summer annual weeds, apply before the end of March.
• It is time to start mowing. Fescue lawns should be mowed 3 inches high. Try to mow frequently enough to remove no more than 1/3 of the blade at a time.

Ornamentals

• This is a good time to do severe pruning on shrubs that need renovation.
• Cut back liriope, mondo grass and ornamental grasses.
• Wait until late in the month to prune rose bushes and butterfly bush.
• Slow release fertilizer can be applied to trees and shrubs
• Repot house plants. Clean old pots thoroughly and use good quality potting soil. If the potting soil contains fertilizer, do not use additional fertilizer for 6 to 8 weeks.

Fruits

• Prune fruit trees, blueberries and grapes.
• Plant blueberries, grapes and blackberries.
• Plan to stay on top of pest control for fruit trees. See the home orchard guide at: http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/pp/notes/Fruit/fdin002/fdin002.htm

Vegetables

• It is time to plant cool-season vegetables. Direct seed kale, spinach, lettuce, onions and peas.
• Mid to late-month set out transplants for cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower.
• Install the trellis, or “pea fence” when planting English or edible-pod peas so the plants can begin to climb soon after emergence.
• Plant Irish potatoes.
• It takes about 6 weeks to grow tomato and pepper transplants from seed. Plant in late March for garden planting in early May.
• Squash and cucumbers only take 4 weeks, so don’t start them indoors until April. Or just wait until the second week in May and plant the seeds in the garden.

Other

• Sometimes the best way to grow a new flower or vegetable variety, or perhaps heirloom varieties, is to start plants from seed. If you do not have a location with enough direct sunlight, transplants can be grown under florescent shop lights. See “Starting Plants from Seeds,” http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8703.html.
**Don’t Crowd Seedlings**

Seeds planted directly in the garden often need to be thinned after the seedlings emerge. Do not let the plants get too large before thinning them out. It is best to thin when they have only 1 to 2 “true leaves” (the leaves that come after the “seed leaves” that look like the plant’s mature leaves).

One technique is to use scissors to snip off extra plants to avoid damaging the roots of the remaining plants. If you need them elsewhere, seedlings can be carefully dug and transplanted by using a tool like a knife or fork to gently lift the little plant from below. Water the patch after thinning, especially if you pull the extra plants, thereby disturbing the surviving plant roots.

Recommended final spacing for lettuce and greens is 6 inches. Carrots and beets can be as close as 2 inches. Peas should be 1 inch apart, and beans 3-4 inches.

**Attacking English Ivy**

Spring cleaning sometimes means time to tackle tough weeds - especially those invasive plants like multiflora rose, oriental bittersweet and English ivy. While most woody plants are best controlled with herbicide applications in late summer, English ivy is an exception. Research at NC State University has found that the ivy is best controlled with Roundup (glyphosate) when it has only 2 to 4 new leaves in the spring. If you want to get rid of an extensive patch of English ivy, a good approach is to mow it in winter with a mower or string trimmer. This should give you lots of fresh new leaves in spring to absorb the herbicide.

**All - American Selections**

Each year the All-American Selections committee test 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 2009 introductions.

*Viola ‘Rain Blue and Purple’* is a unique Johnny Jump-up with flowers that start off purple and white and change to purple and blue. The plant spreads 10 to 14 inches wide and is suitable for baskets, containers or the garden.

*Eggplant ‘Gretel’* produces small white eggplants that are harvested at only 3 to 4 inches long. They can be ready to harvest in as little as 55 days.

*Melon ‘Lambkin’* is an unusual type of melon producing a thin rind and sweet, aromatic, white flesh. The fruit matures earlier than most melons, in about 75 days.

*‘Honey Bear’* squash is an acorn type squash that grows a compact plant, more suitable for today’s smaller gardens. It produces 3 to 5 dark green fruit per plant and is tolerant to powdery mildew.
The Edible Garden: Blueberries

Right now a lot of people are interested in growing their own food. So, not surprisingly, the Extension office has been receiving a lot of phone calls about blueberries. Even though I just wrote about blueberries last year, here is some repeat information. Blueberry bushes are a natural choice for an “edible landscape”, and in fact are a pretty easy crop to grow in western North Carolina—if you plant them correctly and can beat the bears and birds to the harvest.

Highbush is the type of blueberry that grows wild here in the mountains, and is generally the best choice for this area. There are many good varieties available. They will be most productive if planted in full sun. But they will do well with as little as a half day of sun, making them one of the more shade tolerant fruit crops.

Highbush blueberries need an unusually low soil pH of 4.5 to 5.0. This means it is especially important to do a soil test to check the pH before you plant. They are also particular about soil drainage. To ensure your plants are happy, it is a good idea to amend the planting site with plenty of organic material such as pine bark soil conditioner.

Blueberries are well suited to the organic garden because they rarely need to be treated for disease or insect problems and require little fertilizer.

Now, here is the hard part. In order to grow large, strong bushes that will produce bumper crops in years to come, you must not allow your blueberry bushes to bear fruit for the first 2 to 3 years. That’s right—you will need to remove flowers or fruit to prevent the plant from being stunted early-on by putting all of its energy into fruit instead of establishing a strong plant and root system.

For more information on selecting blueberry varieties see: http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-201.html.

Water-Wise Landscape: Go Easy on Fertilizer

You know that nitrogen fertilizer is what makes plants grow. The more you put on the lawn, the more mowing you will have to do; and the more you put on shrubs, the faster they will grow. Up to a certain point, encouraging vigorous plant growth is a good thing. But if plants are still being pushed when hot dry weather gets here in the summer, the plants will need an adequate water supply to maintain that lush growth.

That does not necessarily mean that we should not fertilize the landscape or lawn. What it does mean is that we should avoid using excess amounts of fertilizer (which costs us more money, too) and we should try not to have a lot of nitrogen available to the plants in mid-summer.

If you fertilize at all, do so sparingly. Apply the slow-release nitrogen to the lawn by the first of March so it will run out by early summer. Fertilize shrubs in February or March. Flower and vegetable gardens are an exception because the summer months are generally when you need the plants to be growing. Of course, the vegetable garden needs to have about one inch of water each week anyway.

Almanac Gardener

The popular Almanac Gardener program returns to UNC-TV on April 4 at 12 noon, and will run weekly through August 15. This production of North Carolina Cooperative Extension and UNC-TV has been providing timely gardening advice for North Carolina gardeners for 26 years.

To receive this newsletter via email Phone 255-5522 or email: joyce.plemmons@buncombecounty.org
Surviving in Challenging Times

Many of us are looking for ways to conserve our budgets. We want to make sure we spend wisely, and perhaps learn to do more things ourselves. Buncombe County Cooperative Extension has been putting together programs and information to help. Check out our new web page by going to our home page at: http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu and clicking the link for “Surviving (& Thriving!) Through Troubled Times.”

Here are some free programs I have scheduled next month. You do not have to register, just come.

Helping Buncombe County Residents Survive (& Thrive) Through Troubled Times

Pack Memorial Library
67 Haywood St. Asheville, NC

Tuesday, April 7, 6:00-7:30 pm
Growing Your Own Vegetables

Tuesday, April 14, 6:00—7:30 pm
Backyard Small Fruit

Tuesday, April 21, 6:00—7:30 pm
Being Dollar-Wise in the Landscape and Garden

Also consider the next 3 Extension Master Gardener programs for “Gardening in the Mountains” at The North Carolina Arboretum. Talks start at 10:00. They are also free.

March 10 - Vegetable Gardening
April 14 - Integrating Edibles into the Landscape
May 12 - Gardening for Tough Times

Rain Barrel Sale

Because people are still asking about rain barrels, we are offering one more sale. The 80 gallon barrel measures 37 inches high and 28 inches wide. It is made of 20% recycled high density polypropylene. It comes complete with fittings and installation instructions. You can find more information about the barrels at: http://www.rainbarrelusa.com/80%20Gallon.html

80 gallon barrel $110
Payment by March 27

Pick Up Day
Saturday, April 4
9:00—1:00
WNC Farmers Market

Quantities will be limited. An order form can be found on the web site at: http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu or call 255-5522.
Coming Events

- **March 7—Spring Garden School: The Edible Garden**, Presented by Extension Master Gardeners at the Folk Art Center, Blue Ridge Parkway, Asheville, 9:30 am-4:00pm. $10 and pre-registration required.

- **March 10— Growing in the Mountains: Vegetable Gardening**, Presented by the Extension Master Gardeners at The North Carolina Arboretum, 10:00—11:00 am. Free admission, no pre-registration.

- **March 21 & 22—16th Annual Organic Growers School**, Blue Ridge Community College, Flat Rock, NC, Early registration deadline is March 1. [http://www.organicgrowersschool.org/content/1505](http://www.organicgrowersschool.org/content/1505)

- **March 27— Deadline for ordering rain barrels for April 4 pick-up** at the WNC Farmer’s Market.

- **March 27 & 28 — Ask A Gardener Information Table**, at the WNC BBQ Cook Off and Bluegrass Jam, WNC Farmers’ Market.

- **April 4—Rain Barrel Pick Up Day**, WNC Farmers’ Market, 8:30am—1:00pm

- **April 11— EMG Plant Problem Clinic**, breezeway at the WNC Farmers’ Market, 11am—2pm.