As an Extension Agent, I know when I’m beaten! Sometime you just have to learn to co-habit with the weeds. It makes life easier.

Ode to a Weed

I look out my window and what do I see?
A field of wildflowers—or could it be weeds?
Colorful blossoms scatter the ground,
While herbicide labels are read all around.

This one kills clover but it’s too late to spray
And this one is good for a cool cloudy day.
Some kill before the weed does appear
But some only work when foliage is near.

Good plants or bad, it does seem as though
These weeds are not planning to leave or to go,
Away from our beds or our pastures or lawns
They’re here for the season no matter how long.

To some they bring beauty, to others a mess
Their presence can often cause unwanted stress
But let’s try to see the weed a new way
They let us know that spring’s on the way.

Wild onions and henbit and sedges galore
With chickweed and crabgrass and clover and more
Their goal is to rule the whole world one day
And laugh in the face of granules and sprays.

My hats off to you, the weeds of the garden,
You fight a great battle and eventually harden yourselves to all poisons and potions around
And gracefully cover all spots of bare ground.
INVASION
of the Moles

There are a lot of moles in Burke County lawns this year. I’m getting several calls each day from homeowners who are frustrated with the endless tunnels crossing their lawns. Along with the tunnel complaints, I often hear about holes all over the area as well. Well, folks you’ve got more than one thing going on.

First of all, yes the raised tunnels do indicate moles and moles are voracious feeders, hence lots of tunnels. Moles eat insects, worms and grubs but their favorite is the earthworm, with grubs coming in second. Folks with well-maintained lawns just naturally have more earthworms so the moles gravitate to the yard with the best buffet. Yes, you get punished for taking good care of your lawn.

Getting rid of grubs might help a little but it won’t solve the problem. The old-fashioned pronged mole trap will (solve the problem). It’s not the most pleasant task but it works. First, go out and locate one of the straighter, longer tunnels in the yard. Tramp down a section of the tunnel and set the trap in that spot. When the mole comes through and has to re-excavate the tunnel, the digging springs the trap and…mole-kabobs! Reset the trap and try again. Only a few moles can do a lot of damage. Moles are solitary and territorial so there probably aren’t more than two or three in the area.

Don’t waste your time with pinwheels, ultra sonic devices, Juicy Fruit chewing gum or any of the many home remedies out there. Use the trap! Buck up and be tough.

As for the many holes, it is most likely skunks digging in the lawn for grubs, their favorite food. The only way to get rid of the skunks that are digging the holes is to get rid of the grubs—which you can’t do right now. This time of year grubs are large and tough and pesticides don’t work. So, you have to wait until the time is right. Once this year’s grubs mature and form beetles, they lay eggs for next year’s grubs. A pesticide such as Grub X or Bayer Advanced Season Long Grub Control applied in July will prevent next-year’s grubs from hatching. But the product must contain imidacloprid. Another solution is to treat the lawn with a product containing trichlorfon from mid-August through the end of October. This will kill newly hatched grubs. Some available products are Dylox or Bayer Advanced 24 Hour Grub Control.

It is a complex problem with no easy solution but your yard can be free of tunnels, holes, moles and skunks if you follow the right steps. If I have confused you, give me a call at the Extension office at 439-4460.
Farmer’s Markets Set To Open

Local farmers markets are gearing up for another season here in Burke County. We are fortunate to have markets located at four different locations in the county. The Morganton market will open at 8:00 on Saturday, May 8, 2010. It will be open on Saturdays from 8:00 until noon. The market is located in downtown Morganton just behind Geppettos. The Valdese market will open on Friday, May 14 at 2:00 on Faet St. just across from the Town Hall. Operating hours throughout the season will be Wednesdays from 8:00 until noon and Fridays from 2:00 until 5:00. The Hildebran market, which opened last year at the Town Hall in Hildebran will have its first day on Tuesday, May 25 at 1:00. The operating hours for the summer will be Tuesdays 1:00 to 6:00 and Thursdays 8:00 to noon. We are adding another market this year in Connelly Springs. It will open on May 24 at the Connelly Springs Town Hall at 8:00 and will run through the summer on Mondays from 8:00 until noon.

Burke County residents now have a farmer’s market for every day of the week. There’s a market close to you, no matter what part of the county you live in. The markets are always looking for new vendors. You don’t have to be a large producer to sell at a market. If you are interested in becoming a farmer’s market vendor, you can call our office at 439-4460 for details.

Interesting Garden Destination

Roan Mountain, located in Mitchell County is a spectacular natural wonder and one of the states most valuable treasures. No more than a two-hour drive, Roan Mountain is not a single mountain but is a five mile long ridge ranging from a height of 6,286 feet at Roan High Knob, down to 5,500 feet at Carver's Gap.

Located in the Pisgah National Forest it is home to a section of the Appalachian Trail, many mature spruce and fir trees and its most visited site, a 600 acre rhododendron garden. The thousands of Catawba rhododendrons flower in mid-June and draw visitors to stroll the trails that wind among these native plants blooming in masses of red, pink and lavender.

Another unusual sight at Roan Mountain is its grassy balds. These grassy meadows have been maintained for thousands of years by the grazing of prehistoric animals, followed by elk and bison and in the last century, goats, hogs, mules and horses. Roan Mountain is also home to at least 188 species of birds, many of which are high priority species.

Whether your interests lean towards picnicking, hiking or photography, Roan Mountain is a North Carolina resource that should not be overlooked. Take the opportunity to visit Roan Mountain this summer and enjoy the many gifts it has to offer.
Growing America’s Favorite Vegetable

Have you been counting the days until you can put the first tomato plant in the ground? There is no denying that the tomato is the most popular garden plant in America. Almost everyone has room for a couple of tomato plants, no matter how limited their space is.

The tomato is a very satisfying plant to grow. It has large, interesting fruits that come in many different colors and shapes. There are early varieties and late varieties and the benefits of this fruit are many: They make great sandwiches, salads, soups, sauces and the taste is never better than when it comes from your own garden.

But, let’s talk about some ways to become even better at growing this favorite vegetable. First, choose varieties that are disease resistant. Some tomatoes are bred to be resistant to many of the diseases that affect tomatoes. Next, don’t plant all of your tomato crop at once. Spread them out over about a six-week period, planting new plants every two weeks. This will insure fresh tomatoes up until frost. Always stake or cage your tomatoes. Keeping them off of the ground will prevent some diseases and it will also assure that the fruit is clean and free of loose soil.

Should you plant determinate or indeterminate vines? Determinate tomatoes grow only so tall and most of the harvest comes in a short period of time. Determinate plants would work well if you wanted a large crop to can or freeze or if you had limited space. Indeterminate vines continue to grow and bear all summer long but can be a challenge to keep staked or caged as they continue to get taller and taller. Heirloom plants seem to be very popular these days. Most heirlooms have a great taste and color but are probably not very disease resistant.

Tomatoes need full sun and good drainage. They should be rotated each year so that diseases don’t build up in the soil. If early and late blight are a problem, start spraying as soon as plants are established. Use a good general-purpose fertilizer about every two weeks and keep uniformly moist. Don’t allow the plants to dry out and become stressed.

Enjoy your tomato crop this year and always add a couple of new varieties each year. Whether you lean towards tiny grape tomatoes or the giant goliath types. There’s sure to be a variety out there that suits your taste.

“It’s difficult to think anything but pleasant thoughts while eating a homegrown tomato.”

Lewis Grizzard
The Right Azalea For You

Spring in the south brings to mind many things but one of the first pictures that comes to mind is the azalea. The colors are endless as are the shapes and sizes of the plants themselves. They can be depended on to bloom every year without fail and to withstand the coldest winters. They live and flower for decades and require very little attention when established in a spot to their liking.

However, an azalea that is unhappy with its surroundings will let the gardener know in a hurry that it is not pleased. An unhappy plant can become infested with more diseases and insects imaginable and can quickly become scrawny, off color, out of shape, bloomless and can actually seem to get smaller and smaller each year.

The trick is to pick the right azalea for the right spot in the landscape. There are so many to choose from that it should not be a difficult task to find a plant that fits. Many gardeners make the mistake of simply choosing by color. This is easy to do because many garden centers display by color and not by cultivar. Many plants have generic tags on them and do not give specific information about that variety.

First of all, azaleas need an acidic, well drained soil with some shade. Deep shade is not good because the plant does need some sun to thrive. Some azaleas are compact while others are spreading and upright so it should be decided which of these types would fit the space that is available. Putting a large plant in a area that can only handle a compact plant means constant pruning to keep the plant within bounds and the uniqueness of its shape will be totally lost. A plant that grows four feet tall should never be planted under windows that are only three feet off the ground.

The weather is also a consideration. Early blooming varieties are far more likely to be damaged by late freezes than mid-season or late blooming varieties. In western North Carolina, late freezes are common and in many years the earlier blooming azaleas are are ruined. Some varieties are not cold hardy for this area and should be avoided. Culture tags on the plants should give a cold hardiness rating.

When purchasing azaleas for the home landscape keep these things in mind to check before making a choice: specific variety name, height, width, flowering time and cold hardiness. An informed choice is the best choice when buying azaleas.

Did You Know ???

A pineapple is a berry.

The average person mows his/her lawn 30 times a season, which equals about three feet of turfgrass.

Apples, not caffeine, are more efficient at waking you up in the morning.
Homeowner Relief For Brown Patch

Brown patch is a common disease of fescue lawns and it certainly makes itself known here in Burke County. The disease starts as small brown areas of turf grass that eventually die out, leaving the lawn with dead patches throughout.

Brown patch is caused by several factors: high levels of nitrogen fertilizer in the lawn combined with hot weather, prolonged periods of wet weather and overcast skies and high humidity. It is recommended that lawns be fertilized early in the season rather than later in the spring when high temperatures are expected. But, even when the homeowner does everything right, brown patch can still occur when conditions are just right-like this year.

Control is difficult and expensive and many times impossible because of the lack of suitable fungicides available to the homeowner. Products containing Azoxystrobin are very effective in controlling brown patch but these products have never been available in sizes suitable for homeowners. The products have been packaged for use by commercial landscapers and lawn care companies who purchase them in the large, costly containers.

But, that is changing. This year a granular product containing Azoxystrobin has become available to homeowners. This product covers 5,000 square feet and is selling at a reasonable price and is now for sell at some area stores. As a rule, granulars are not as good as liquids at controlling diseases but if the homeowner follows the label directions when applying the product, he should obtain good results. Azoxystrobin works as a contact spray and as a systemic spray, which means that control can last up to 28 days. Keep in mind that above normal amounts of rainfall can shorten the time period.

All in all, the appearance of this homeowner-friendly product is a good sign for homeowners who have fought a losing battle with brown patch for years. Good turf grass management is still necessary in the control of brown patch but it is encouraging that better products are on the horizon to help us in our endeavors.

If you would like more information about brown patch and its control, you can reach me at 439-4460.
Meaning of Plant Catalog Terminology

"A favorite of birds" means to avoid planting near cars, sidewalks, or clotheslines.

"Grows more beautiful each year" means "looks like roadkill for the foreseeable future."

"Zone 5 with protection" is a variation on the phrase "Russian Roulette."

"May require support" means your daughter's engineering degree will finally pay off.

"Moisture-loving" plants are ideal for landscaping all your bogs and swamps.

"Carefree" refers more to the plant's attitude than to your workload.

"Vigorous" is code for "has a Napoleonic compulsion to take over the world."

"Grandma's Favorite" - until she discovered free-flowering, disease-resistant hybrids.
Upcoming Events

April 17 - Container Gardening
   Morganton Ace Hardware - 10:00 a.m.

April 21 - Master Gardener Graduation

April 22 - Weed Tour
   Burke County Agricultural Building - 6:00 p.m.

May 22 - Insects & Diseases of the Vegetable Garden
   Morganton Ace Hardware - 10:00 a.m.

Earth Day is April 22, 2010

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