Have weeds been a continuous plaguing problem in your yard? Year after year they seem to come back, appearing in different places around the landscape. What is a homeowner to do?

Weeds that die in the winter, but come back each summer from seeds are called summer annuals. Crabgrass, prickly lettuce, spotted spurge and common ragweed are examples of summer annuals.

The key to controlling summer annuals is preventing their seeds from germinating. This means pre-emergence control of the weed seed. The most common control method used today is applying chemicals. There are several different pre-emergence herbicides on the market. Some are listed only for use in turf areas; others are listed for use only in ornamental plantings; there are some listed for use in both turf areas and ornamental plantings.

Words of caution when using any chemical: ALWAYS read and follow the label directions. Manufacturers often change labels as chemicals are improved or altered.

There are two basic ways a pre-emergence herbicide works. These chemicals will target the radical (the root that emerges from the seed) or the new stem as it emerges from the seed. The objective is to burn or injure the plant before it begins growing. In either case the chemical needs to be in the soil prior to the seed germinating or the chemical can’t do the job it was designed to do. Apply these chemicals in early February for best results.

Another method of pre-emergence weed control is to use cultural methods of control. This means developing a healthy, thick turf canopy. For those growing tall fescue this also means cutting the lawn at a height of 3 to 4 inches to prevent sunlight from penetrating to the soil where the seeds are.

With summer turf where the lawn is dormant at the time the seeds are beginning to germinate it becomes a little tougher. Proper fertilization and mowing during the summer is most important. A thick canopy even in a dormant lawn will prevent some

(Continued on page 4)
Featured Plant

*Hamamelis sp.*
**Whitchhazel**

To add some bright color and fragrance to your winter landscape, consider planting a witchhazel or two. Be forewarned, though! You may have some difficulty deciding *which* witchhazel to choose.

*Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Arnold Promis'

*Taken by: Mark Weathington*

Depending on the species and variety, witchhazels are loosely spreading shrubs or small trees, ranging from 6’ to 15’ tall and wide. Bloom times vary from late fall through early spring, and its small flowers — in yellow, gold, orange or red — look somewhat spider-like. In addition to their striking color in the landscape, many witchhazels are very fragrant. In addition, the foliage of these deciduous shrubs puts on a good show in the fall, when the leaves of most varieties turn yellow with highlights of red to purple.

*Common witchhazel is hardy from zones 4-9 and includes native varieties* *Hamamelis virginiana*, which flowers in the fall, and *Hamamelis vernalis*, which flowers in late winter. For the most reliable flowering, John MacNair, NC State Cooperative Extension Specialist, recommends cultivars of Hybrid witchhazel (*Hamamelis x intermedia*), hardy in zones 5-9.

Witchhazels do best in moist soils with a little light shade, although they will tolerate full sun. To get the most enjoyment from their flowers and fragrance, plant them near a path or walkway. **Maintenance is easy; witchhazels require only occasional pruning to improve their shape.**

So how did such a lovely little tree get such a funny name? *Witch* has its roots in the Old English word *wice*, meaning bendable. And *hazel*? In England, hazel twigs were used as diving rods to find water, and early settlers in America are thought to have used the branches of witchhazels for this same purpose.

**By Patty Brown**

**Sources and resources:**
- [NCSU Witchhazel Fact Sheet](#)
- [Extension Gardener Newsletter](#)
- [Witch Hazel for Your Winter Landscape](#)
Upcoming Events

Blueberry and Blackberry Pruning Workshop will be held Friday, February 12 at the CEFS Small Farm Unit 1:00 until 4:00 pm. Learn pruning techniques from Research and Extension Specialist Dr. Bill Cline. Space is limited so preregistration by Wednesday, March 10 is a must. Contact Diane Lynch at (919) 731-1525 for more information.

Grapevine Pruning Workshop will be held Saturday, February 13th at Hinnant Family Vineyards 826 Pine Level-Micro Road, Pine Level, NC. Class begins at 10:00 am and lasts for about 2 hours. Please contact Shawn Banks to preregister for this free workshop.

Shitake Mushroom Production Workshop: Saturday, February 13 at the Johnston County Livestock Arena from 10:00 am until 12:00 noon; receive hands on experience inoculating logs with mushroom spawn. The workshop costs $10.00 plus you will need to bring a log to inoculate. For more information and to register contact Elizabeth Wilson at (919) 989-5380.

Tool Up for Spring! Will be held Wednesday, February 17 6:30 – 8:30 pm at the Arboretum at JCC mobile classroom. This is a hands-on class focusing on readying you garden tools for the spring. There is a $10.00 fee and preregistration is required. Contact Lin Frye at (919) 209-2052.

Plant a Row for the Hungry at the Arboretum at JCC will begin Thursday, February 18 at 10:00am. This informal class will be for volunteers to learn more information about vegetable gardening while doing everything from planting seeds in the greenhouse to harvesting the finished crop. For more information contact Lin Frye at (919) 209-2052.

Ornamental Tree Pruning Workshop will be held at the Johnston County Cooperative Extension Office on Saturday, February 27 from 10:00am until 12:00 noon. Learn from our local forester the proper way to prune ornamental trees in the landscape. For more information contact Angie Hampton at (919) 989-5380.

Fruit Tree Training and Pruning Workshop will be held Saturday, January 30th at Central Crops Research Station located on Highway 70 business near the Wal-Mart in Clayton. The class will begin at 10:00 am and lasts for about 2 to 3 hours. Please contact Shawn Banks by phone 989-5380 or e-mail shawn_banks@ncsu.edu to preregister for this free workshop.

Insect Investigator

Big Eyed Bugs

*Geocoris sp*

*Order: Hemiptera*

Big eyed bugs get their name from the over-sized eyes they have on their heads. The eyes are so large they cover part of pronotum (the area just behind the head). There are three different species of big eyed bugs found in the US and all three are listed as having North Carolina as part of their range. The three species are *Geocoris bullatus*, *G. punctipes*, and *G. uliginosus*.

Big eyed bugs range in size from 1/8 inch to ¼ inch in length and are roughly oval in shape. They are predators of several other insect species including small caterpillars and caterpillar eggs, fleahoppers, lygus bugs, mites, thrips, and whiteflies. If prey is in short supply they may also feed on some seeds and plant juices, but are not considered a plant pest.
Ready for Harvest
By Laura Brandsburg

What is ready to harvest in February? SPINACH! Did you plant any in fall? I hope so!

Spinach – some people say BLECH! Poor spinach – it gets a bad wrap. Spinach is very tasty- you just need to prepare it right. Not only is it good- it is so good for you. We all remember dear old Popeye eating his (slimy) can of spinach and immediately having the strength of an army in his biceps, (good subliminal marketing for kids to eat their spinach). Hopefully we have all grown up now and enjoy fresh or fresh frozen spinach and all the many benefits there are for us. Those thin leaves of green leafy spinach are full of vitamins and minerals. Check this out- Vitamin A, B, C, K, Iron, Calcium, Iodine, Magnesium and fiber! Did you know spinach is 49% calcium? WOW! If you can’t get it from a u-pick farm, or your own garden, you can always get some at the store-pick up a nice big bag, make salad and this yummy healthy Spinach-Rice Casserole.

2 Cups uncooked brown rice
1 Tbls. Butter or olive oil
2 Cups minced onion
2 Lbs. fresh spinach, stemmed and finely chopped
1 tsp. sea or kosher salt
2 to 3 medium cloves garlic minced
½ tsp. nutmeg
¼ tsp. cayenne pepper
Black pepper to taste
½ Cup sunflower seeds
2 beaten eggs
1 Cup Lowfat milk
1 ½ Cups Grated cheddar cheese
Paprika
*Optional- add 1-2 Cups cooked diced chicken

1) Place the rice in a medium sized saucepan with 3 cups water. Cover, bring to a boil, then lower to the slowest possible simmer. Cook, covered and undisturbed, for 35-40 minutes. Remove from heat. Transfer to a medium-sized bowl, and fluff with a fork.

2) Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Oil or spray a 9x13-inch baking pan.

3) Heat the butter/oil, in a deep skillet. Add onion and sauté 5-8 minutes~until soft. Add spinach, salt, and garlic and cook about 5 minutes. More over medium heat, stirring frequently. Add this to the rice, along with the seasonings and half the sunflower seeds. Mix well.

4) Beat together the eggs and milk, and stir this into the spinach-rice mixture, along with the grated cheese.

5) Spread into prepared pan, sprinkle with remaining sunflower seeds and dust with paprika. Bake uncovered for 35-40 minutes- until heated through and lightly browned on top. Enjoy! (freezes well too!)

Pre-emergence (Cont. from pg 1)

seeds from receiving the light they need to germinate.

Lawn maintenance calendars can be found on the TurfFiles website or they can be obtained at the local NC Cooperative Extension. These calendars give information on the proper height to mow your turf and when to begin a fertilizer schedule.

In landscape beds a fresh layer of mulch at a thickness of 1 to 2 inches will cover and seeds. Excluding the light from the seed prevents germination. The mulch also spruces up the beds and makes the fresh spring colors really stand out.

A soil sample submitted for testing is another cultural practice that can be used to prevent weeds. If the soil has the correct pH and fertility for the plants to grow, they will form a nice canopy over the soil that will also exclude sunlight.

There seems to be a pattern emerging. To prevent weed seed from germinating, exclude sunlight or apply chemicals. Either of these two methods will work well as a pre-emergence weed control method.
February Garden Tasks

Lawn Care

- Cool season grasses should be fertilized mid-month. If a soil sample has not been taken, use a fertilizer of at least 30% slow release Nitrogen at the rate of 1 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet.
- Crabgrass usually will start to germinate about the same time the Forsythia blooms. If you have had problems with crabgrass in the past, then you may want to apply crabgrass preventer when the Forsythia blooms.
- Pulling wild onion/wild garlic is the best way to get rid of these pesky bulbs, but make sure you get the bulb. If there are too many to pull, a product with 2,4-D works well to help control this weed. Be sure to follow the manufactures directions found on the label. Complete control may take two or more years. Apply 2,4-D at half the recommended rate on centipede lawns otherwise it will damage the grass.
- For more tips on lawn care visit Turf Files on the Internet.

Trees, Shrubs, and Ornamentals

- Cut back dormant ornamental grasses before new growth starts to about 10 to 14 inches above the soil. Evergreen ornamental grasses (or grass like ornamentals) such as Liriope and Mondo Grass should be cut short or mowed to remove last year’s unsightly foliage. If the clumps have become too big for the area they can be divided and shared with friends or planted in other areas of the yard.
- Summer blooming shrubs bloom on new growth so they can be pruned hard in February to encourage new growth and many flowers. Examples include Abelia, Hibiscus, Hydrangea, Beautyberry, Butterfly bush, Althea, Rose of Sharon, and bush or Tea Roses. Shrub Pruning Calendar

- Spring blooming shrubs such as Azaleas, Rhododendrons, Forsythia, Spirea, Quince, Weigela, and Climbing Roses bloom on last years growth and should not be pruned until after they have flowered.
- Deciduous trees especially those that bloom in the spring should not be pruned this time of the year. Examples being Dogwoods, Red Buds, Maples and several others.
- For many evergreens this is the best time of the year to prune if they haven't been pruned already. Evergreen Pruning Calendar

Edibles

- Asparagus crowns can be planted now through March.
- Transplant cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower out into the garden.
- Strawberry plants can be planted now for spring fruits.
- Beets, carrots, peas, lettuce, mustard, radish, spinach, irish potatoes, and turnips can be sown outside.
- Starting seeds indoors is easy and economical. Sometimes it is the only way to get the color or variety of the plants you want to grow. It is not necessary to use
• "grow lights", ordinary florescent tubes will usually be enough. For more information you can read the pamphlet "Starting Plants from Seeds", it is on the web at [http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8703.html](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8703.html)

• February and March are good months to prune fruit trees.

• It is time to start a spray program for peach trees to control the many diseases and insects that attack peaches.

**Insects**

• Control overwintering insects such as scale and their eggs by hand picking or using a dormant oil spray (also know as horticultural oil). Be sure to check for scales before spraying and follow the manufactures directions when applying any pesticide. Do not apply dormant oils to broadleaf evergreens when freezing temperatures are expected.

• Cool-weather mites are not visible to the naked eye. Junipers and other needled evergreens are a favorite hang out these mites. If you had some of these plants that were an unsightly brown last year, check them with a hand held magnifying glass to see if cool season mites are to blame. Horticultural oil or other registered insecticides can improve their situation and appearance.

**Houseplants**

• Even houseplants need a little rest once in a while, and this is a good time to give them a rest. Keep them watered but give them a break from the fertilizer as most houseplants don't do much growing during the short days of winter.

• Turn and prune houseplants regularly to keep them shapely. Pinch back new growth to promote busy plants.

• While this may sound extremely silly, your houseplants will thank you for it. When dusting the furniture, also dust the plants. Wipe dust from broad-leaf plants at regular intervals using a cloth dampened with clean water. If the plant has small leaves, consider placing several in the shower to wash the dust off.

• Keep an eye open for pest on indoor plants. Most can be treated with insecticidal soaps.