Happy New Year! It’s time to put out the old and bring in the new. It’s a time to make resolutions to do better or be a better person. I have given this a lot of thought. I was wondering how I could make this newsletter better; give it a new look; give it a more positive outlook. Over the last couple of months, I have been working on a new look for the newsletter. I hope you will enjoy the way it looks now. I may need to make a few more minor changes before it is all perfect, but I think it is just about the way it needs to be.

On the more positive note, I want to familiarize you, the reader, with beneficial insects; what they look like; how they are beneficial; where they live; and how to attract these beneficial insects to your yard. There is a list of the top ten most wanted insects that I will work from, plus there are a few not on the top ten list that are also important.

It is not my intention to turn this newsletter into an organic newsletter. I do, however, want to cover topics such as composting, recycling, and natural resource conservation strategies in some of the feature articles. If there is a topic that you would like to see covered in this year’s newsletter, contact me, Shawn Banks, at the Johnston County Extension office 989-5380 or shawn_banks@ncsu.edu and we will do our best to get it into the newsletter this year.

I have a list of plants I would like to cover this year in the newsletter, but if there are specific plants you would like to learn more about let me know. I want to cover plants that are of interest to you, the readers of this newsletter.

With your help I hope to make this one of the best newsletters in the state of North Carolina and possibly the nation. Let me know how I can make this newsletter better for you.
Featured Plant

*Camellia sp.*

Did you know there are at least four different species of Camellia that will live in our climate here in North Carolina? *Camellia japonica* and *Camellia sasanqua* are both hardy in USDA hardiness zones 7 – 9, while *Camellia oleifera* and *Camellia sinesis* are both hardy in USDA hardiness zones 6-9. A fun fact for tea drinkers is that many teas are made from the leaves of *C. sinesis*.

While doing some research for this article, I discovered that I probably have three different species of Camellia in my yard. I know I have two different species for sure, but according to the descriptions, I most likely have a cultivar of *C. oleifera* as well as the *C. japonica* and *C. sasanqua*.

Camellias are so popular for their flowers during the cold months that several societies have been formed. There is an American Camellia Society that covers the whole of the United States and then there are all the smaller societies, seven of which are located here in North Carolina. The closest one to us would be the Triangle Camellia Society located in Raleigh. For more information on Camellia societies, view the American Camellia Society’s website at [http://www.camellias-acs.com/](http://www.camellias-acs.com/).

Upcoming Events

**Extension Master Gardener Training** will begin Wednesday, January 20th at 1:30 pm. We will meet each week for three hours until April 14th when we will hold the final class. The class will cost $65.00 if you get the manual on CD and $100.00 if you get the manual as a three ring binder. If you are interested in taking this class contact Shawn Banks by phone 989-5380 or by e-mail shawn_banks@ncsu.edu to get an application and more information on the class.

**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.

**Gardening 101: Growing your Own Produce** is part of the JCC Arboretum lecture series. This class will cover things you need to know to get started growing a backyard vegetable garden. The class will be held Wednesday, February 3rd at the JCC Arboretum starting at 6:30 pm. This class costs $15 and required preregistration by calling 209-2052 or online registration (preferred) at [http://www.johnstoncc.edu/arboretum/events.aspx](http://www.johnstoncc.edu/arboretum/events.aspx).

**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.
Insect Investigator

Lady Beetles
Aka Ladybugs or Ladybird Beetles

Order: Coleoptera
Family: Coccinellidae

There are many species of lady beetles found in North Carolina. Most of them are beneficial both as adults and larva, feeding on soft-bodied insects such as aphids, mites, mealy bugs, and scales. Some species of lady beetle will only feed on one species of aphid, while others will feed on a variety of insects. If the insect food supply of the lady beetle is in short supply they, may feed on nectar, pollen, or in extreme cases they may become cannibalistic.

The life cycle of the lady beetle starts out as an egg laid on a stem or leaf near a food supply. When the egg hatches, the larva emerges looking like a small alligator usually black or gray with yellow or orange markings. The larva goes through three or four instars (stages) while feeding on their prey. When they reach the proper size they pupate. The adults emerge from the pupa to mate and search for a place to lay more eggs or a place to over winter.

Using insecticides on infested plants will reduce the likelihood of lady beetles in the area. Some lady beetles may be resistant to some of the chemicals used to control the pest population, but with little food the lady beetles will move on to happier hunting grounds. Some crop damage may occur prior to lady beetles getting control of the insect population, but if they are in the area the lady beetles will find the food source and shortly have it under control.

References:

January Things to do

LANDSCAPE AREAS

- Plants less than one year old may need some supplemental water to get through the winter.
- Watering well just before a cold snap helps plants survive bitter temperatures.
- Plants with scale insects or spider mite infestations can be treated now with horticultural oil products.
- Some evergreen shrubs like boxwood, gardenia, and Nanina can be pruned now.
- To reduce camellia petal blight collect the fallen flower petals and put them in the compost pile.
- Perennials like daylily, Shasta daisy, and peony can be divided when the ground is dry enough to be worked.
- When searching through seed catalogs look for key phrases like “heat tolerant” and “tolerates humidity”.

EDIBLES

- Prepare the vegetable garden for planting in February by removing weeds and adding compost.
- Mulch strawberry beds with 2-3 inches of wheat straw for winter protection. Remove mulch in spring when blooms appear.
- Asparagus crowns can be planted though March. New plants should not be harvested for 2-3 years.
- Prune fruit trees now through March or when the buds begin to break.

HOUSEPLANTS

- Check holiday gift plants for insects before placing them near other plants.
- Let houseplants rest. Most houseplants are semi-dormant during short days. Save the fertilizer for when they begin to grow in spring.
- Inspect plants that were moved inside for the winter for insects that may have hitched a ride. Treat any found with insecticidal soap.
- Check any bulbs that were dug and stored for the winter for signs of soft rot. Discard any that have become soft and add fresh sawdust. Bulbs that are wrinkled may be too dry mist them with water to prevent dehydration.