From November through March one of the main questions that comes into the Extension office from homeowners is, “When can I prune …?” To help answer this question, there are a few basics that need to be addressed first.

**Why does the plant need to be pruned?**

When pruning to improve the health of the plant is needed, prune away. Wood that is diseased, damaged or dead should be removed as soon as it is noticed. Many insects and diseases take advantage of large open wounds to enter the plant. Removing this wood from the plant will help keep the plant healthy.

When pruning to control plant size, it is important to know what plant you are dealing with. Many summer flowering trees and shrubs, evergreen trees, and shrubs used as hedges may be pruned between November and March. There are a few exceptions to this rule and it never hurts to double check before making the first cut.

When pruning to prevent injury to people or property, it is best to do that when the hazard is noticed. Hazards may include, a dead branch up in a tree, a broken limb that may poke somebody as they walk by, or plants that have thorns growing out into a walkway. When removing a hazard only prune what need to be removed at the time. Heavier pruning may need to be done later.

Training young plants is another reason for pruning. This should be done at the best time of year for pruning that particular plant. For example when training young fruit trees pruning in late winter just before new growth begins will encourage vigorous new growth that can be manipulated to fit the desired shape of the tree.

**What type of cut needs to be made?**

There are three basic types of cuts thinning, heading back, and shearing. Knowing when to make each type of cut is important.

Thinning cuts are used to remove entire branches or side shoots. A thinning cut removes the entire branch back to where it joins with the main trunk or another major branch. When making thinning cuts it is important to look for the branch collar. (The branch collar is where
the regenerative tissues are that will cover over the wound.)

Heading back cuts are made to shorten the length of individual branches. When training a tree to grow in a certain direction a branch may be headed back to a bud that is pointed in the desired direction of growth.

Shearing is similar to heading back; with the exception that shearing is done to many branches at the same time. When a hedge is trimmed, the pruning cut made is a shearing cut. Shearing is used to shape hedges and topiaries.

**What tool should be used?**

There are so many pruning tools available that selecting the right tool for the job can sometimes be difficult. Hand pruners will cut small stems and branches up to ¾ of an inch in diameter. Loppers should be used when cutting branches up to 1 ¾ of an inch in diameter. Pruning saws should be used for branches larger than 1 ¾ of an inch in diameter.

Loppers and hand pruners have two basic designs to choose from, anvil and bypass. The bypass design works similar to a pair of scissors. They generally are the more recommended design because they make a cleaner cut. The anvil design has one sharp blade that comes down against a wide flat piece. This design can make it difficult to make cuts up close to the branch collar and the action of pressing the branch against the large flat surface tends to crush the tender cells in the branch.

When using a pruning saw the tree cut method for removing a branch is recommended. Cut one is on the underside of the branch about 6 to 10 inches away from where the branch will be removed. The first cut should only be about 1/3 of the way through the branch. This first cut is to prevent the weight of the branch as it gets nearly cut through from tearing the bark off down the tree. Cut two is made about 2 to 4 inches further away from where the branch will be removed. This cut is made from the top and should go all the way through. Cut three is the final cut that is made to remove the rest of the branch just outside the branch collar.

**Tip:**

To keep the plant healthy and vigorous, only remove 1/3 of the plants growth in any one year. Removing more may weaken the plant. The exception to this rule is when the purpose for pruning is to rejuvenate the plant.

For more information on pruning trees and shrubs contact Cooperative Extension at 919 989-5380 or visit one of the references listed below.

**Reference:**

Pruning Basics prepared by Durham County Master Gardener Volunteer program, October, 2007, durham.ces.ncsu.edu/files/library/32/UNH%209.PDF


Featured Plant
Ornamental Peach tree
*Prunus sp.*
By Sybil Daniels

Peach trees, or *Prunus persica* have their origins in China. It is believed they were brought to North America by French and Spanish explorers in the 1500s. Primarily grown as a fruit tree, non-fruiting or flowering fruit trees are favored for their spectacular spring display of white, pink red and peppermint (a mixture of red and white) flower petals.

Ornamental peach is a general term for a peach tree that does not bear fruit for daily consumption. Flowing peach trees are sterile in fruit production and bloom early in the spring with large colorful clusters of single or double flowered peach petals. Single flower flowering peaches may bear fruit, but the flavor may not be equal to a variety grown only for fruit. There are four categories, Upright Branch Peach with upright trunk, Longevity Peach that is short and small, Weeping Peach with drooping twigs and Broom Peach with small, broom-shaped tree crown. The branches of flowering peaches can be cut while they are still in flower and used as excellent indoor decorations.

The Ornamental Peach Tree is a deciduous broadleaf tree that requires a certain number of chilling hours to break dormancy properly and set flower buds. They require well-drained soil, perform best in full sun and do not require winter protection in zone 7. The tree is susceptible to peach leaf curl, frost damage, powdery mildew, cankers, crown gall, viruses and peach tree borer. Helpful companion plants are alliums, especially garlic and chives. Deer, mice, chipmunks and related predators generally avoid it. Green manures, clover and alfalfa provide richness. Peach trees grow best in soil with a pH of 6.0 to 7.0. Plant them in early spring on an elevated or sloping site to prevent flower buds from being killed by spring frost. Prune the tree in early spring to remove low-hanging, crowded or crossing branches. Cut back overly long branches to control tree height.


School of Forest Resources and Conservation, University of Florida,

Upcoming Events

**Beginning BeeKeeping:** January 13, 2011 @ 6:00pm – March 17th 8:00pm, contact Lisa Newkirk at 919 739-6931 in Goldsboro for more information or to register.

**Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Training:** starting **Wednesday, January 19th**, please get applications in as soon as possible. Contact Shawn Banks 919 989-5380 for application or more information.

**Fruit Tree Training Demonstration** on **Saturday, January 29** beginning at 10am at Central Crops Research Station. Contact Angie at 919 989-5380 to register or for more information.

**Events at Johnston Community College:** call 919 209-2052 or 919 209-2184 to register for these events.

**January 12 @ 6:30pm The ABC’s of Gardening**

**January 19 @ 6:30pm Fruit Trees, Ornamental Trees and Shrubs**

**January 25 @ 7:00pm Change How You Garden**

**The Sustainable Muscadine Vineyard** on Saturday, **February 12** beginning at 10:00am at the Johnston County Agriculture Center. Call 919 989-5380 to register.

*For more events from Johnston County Cooperative Extension visit our website Johnston.ces.ncsu.edu and click on EVENTS at the top or call 919 989-5380.*
Insect Investigator
Pollinators
By Shawn Banks

A simple topic, or so I thought when I decided this would be a good topic for this newsletter. Pollination is the act of pollen being transferred from the anther (male organ of the flower where the pollen is produced) to the stigma (the female part of the flower that receives the pollen). A pollinator would be anything that transfers pollen from the anther to the stigma.

There are several types of pollinators. The most obvious pollinators would be bees and wasps; this is what I meant to write about when I thought of this topic. There are several other pollinators. Among these other pollinators are flies, beetles, butterflies, moths, ants, birds, and in some cases mammals. Many plants have developed flowers to be attractive to a specific species of animal or insect for pollination. That is a whole article by itself.

One report I read while preparing this article stated that honeybees and other insects produce $40 billion worth of products annually just with their pollination services. I can’t imagine a world without blueberries, melons, peaches, apples, pumpkins, and many of the other fruits and vegetables produced with the pollination services of insects.

I have learned a lesson with this topic; what may seem simple at first glance may be more complicated than it appears. The “simple” topic of pollinators took me on a journey that included birds, bats, rodents and wind in the list of pollinators along with a wide variety of insect pollinators.

Garden Interests
Gourmet Greens
By Karen Damari

Lettuces make a wonderful salad, are relatively easy to grow during the cool season, and there are hundreds of varieties to choose from. But why not add other tasty greens to your year-round garden and salad? Bull’s Blood Beet, Broadleaf Batavian Escarole, Midnight Red Amaranth, Catalogna Chicory – the tantalizing list of edible greens is almost endless. Here are a few to contemplate:

Beetberry Chenopodium capitatum (50 days) has mildly sweet red berries nestled among thick, dark green leaves. Berries, leaves and even the roots are edible.

Corn-Salad aka Fetticus Valerianella locusta (60 days) likes cool weather and can be served like lettuce or cooked like spinach, having a mild, nutty flavor.

Golden Purslane Portulaca oleracea (50 days) contains high amounts of alpha-linolenic acid, a sought-after Omega-3 fatty acid.

Mizuna Brassica rapa ssp. nippisinica (21-45 days) is a cold hardy, vigorous plant, whose slender stalks bear feathery, mildly spice leaves, good for salads and stir-fry.
**Garden Sorrel** *Rumex acetosa* (80-90 days), an heirloom plant, is high in vitamin C. A tangy, lemony flavor, it should be used sparingly in salad and makes a savory soup.

**Tatsoi** *Brassica rapa ssp. narinosa* (45-50 days) has dark green, spoon-shaped leaves with a subtle, yet distinctive flavor that can be harvested even after snowfall.

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### January Garden Tasks

**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.