Feature
Tropicals in the Landscape
By Eloise Adams

While living in four tropical climates I developed a real interest in, and appreciation for, the blooming shrubs and trees of those areas. So much color - all year! The only tree I have tried is the Plumeria and I have been rewarded with a few very fragrant blooms. In Hawaii I used the Plumeria flowers to make leis for visitors who came from the mainland. I particularly like palm trees and there are other tropicals, e.g., bananas and elephant ears, which people grow in the summer landscape. To add some color to all this green why not try some of the following tropicals. Don’t be too anxious to put them outside in the spring, for they prefer temperatures above 55 degree. Here are a few of my favorites.

*Mandevilla splendens* is probably the most popular tropical plant in this area and one of the reasons for its popularity is that it is easy to grow and readily available. It requires rich, well-drained soil with plenty of water and sun.

*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*. Who can resist the bold, beautiful colors of the *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*? Not me. It is probably the most recognizable tropical flower. They are very similar to *Hibiscus moscheutos*, our native perennial hibiscus. They need full sun to keep blooming and ample water. Pick a flower and stick it behind your ear - Hawaiian style. Flowers last only one day. A word of caution - they are not deer resistant.

*Bougainvillea spectabilis*. This is one of my favorites, which I grow as container plants

*Mandevilla splendens*. One can't help but notice the bright pink flowers climbing fences, trellises and mailbox posts.
and/or hanging baskets. The bright floral bracts come in many colors and cover the tiny white flowers. The colors I’m growing this year are Oo-La-La (a raspberry) and Bengal Orange with variegated foliage. Bougainvillea like full sun and well-drained soil and require daily watering.

Ixora coccinea. My love of orange brings me to Ixora coccinea, one of the most colorful of all tropicals. The clusters of flowers, about 3” across, create a vivid mass on the bush. It is not as readily available as the others. Again, full sun, ample moisture, and good drainage.

Plumbago auriculata. Do you like blue flowers? If so, then try Plumbago auriculata. The flowers are in phlox-like clusters covering the plant. It needs full sun, daily watering and good drainage. I have been successful in keeping Plumbago through the winter in the garage. On a sunny warm day I take it outside. It will tolerate cooler temperatures than other tropicals. All parts of the plant are toxic, so keep this one away from small children.

Strelitzia reginae, Bird of Paradise. This is another orange favorite of mine. It has spectacular flowers. Of course it also has blue in it - what a combination. It is a low-maintenance plant, fairly tolerant of soil conditions. They do well in full sun to semi-shade and respond well to regular feeding with a controlled release fertilizer. It is slow growing. Divide infrequently since large crowded clumps bloom best. It is a long lasting cut flower.

With all the tropical plants I have talked about, watering must be consistent throughout the summer. Extra fertilizer is required, as the constant watering leaches away nutrients. Water-soluble fertilizer, as often as once a week, should keep your tropicaals blooming. Whether you try to over-winter your tropicals inside is up to you. If you have ample space in a very well lit room it can work, or you can treat them as annuals, which stimulates the economy. When the temperature is forecast to drop below 55 degrees it is time to bring them in. Remember to examine the plants carefully for insects before moving them inside.

Featured Plant
Windmill Palm
Trachycarpus fortunei
By Heidi Peach

Windmill Palm trees, considered the king of palms for northern climates, is listed as hardy to USDA hardiness zone 7b-8a. However, winterizing techniques can minimize damage in colder zones. Although, the palms you will most likely find to purchase are much smaller, a full-grown palm of this nature can grow up to 20-40’. Their alternatively, fanned 18”-36” long sword-like leaves have a 4’diameter, creating a symmetrical crown as much as a 10’ diameter. Its single trunk will usually be covered with a loose mat of coarse gray and brown fibers.
This palm does produce a yellow, white/cream/gray flower, which is not a showstopper, nor is the blue, up to 1” round palm fruit. There is no known wildlife that cares for its flower or fruit, and it is not edible. The palm is propagated by seeds germinated in 75-degree weather.

Winter frost may brown a few leaf edges, while a big snow or ice storm can damage the main growing point in the center, which should be protected during extreme cold in winter months. Wrapping the tree with burlap, and covering the top of the tree with a blanket on extremely cold nights should protect the plant. A mulch layer of 3 – 6 inches around the base should protect the roots from the cold of winter and drought in summer. If you do encounter some lose of foliage during a harsh winter, only prune back what looks like it will not recover. Do not over prune.

Upcoming Events

**Clayton Farm and Community Market** - Extension Master Gardener Volunteers will be at the Market in Downtown Clayton on Saturday, September 17. If you have gardening questions you would like to have answered stop by and ask an Extension Master Gardener Volunteer.

**Activities at the Arboretum at JCC** - For more information on these activities or to register for one of them call 919 209-2052.

**The Gardens of A.J. Bullock** Tour on September 7 from 8:30am until 3:30pm Cost is $15 and lunch is on your own.

**Apple Festival, Historic Bethabara Park/ Old Salem, Winston Salem** tour on September 17 from 8:30am until 5:30pm. Cost is $15 and lunch is on your own.

**Preserving the Bounty: Dehydration and Canning Workshop** is on September 21 from 6:00pm until 8:00pm. Cost is $25

**UNC - Botanical Gardens** Tour on September 28 from 8:00am until 3:00pm. Cost is $15 Lunch is on your own.
Yard Villian

Green-brier
*Smilax spp.*
By Patty Brown

Don’t let the name deceive you! You won’t be smiling if you find Smilax in your landscape. And if you look for it, you’ll probably find it because it’s widespread. Smilax typically goes by the common name of “greenbrier” (types include lanceleaf, roundleaf, kidneyleaf, laurel and more). It’s a perennial shrubby and thorny vine native to and common throughout North Carolina, the eastern half of the United States, and parts of Canada. The roundleaf greenbrier’s leaves are indeed round and somewhat waxy or glossy.

Left alone, Smilax plants will grow into shrubs, which will eventually become dense thickets. Individual plants can grow up to 10-20 feet in length, climbing trees or other plants and structures and attaching itself with its thorns or tendrils. Varieties of Smilax can be found in both open and woodsy areas, and in moist or dry soil with a moderate pH.

![Figure 3 Smilax leaf](image.jpg)

While Smilax is definitely a nuisance in the garden due to its thorns and clingy ways, it does provide food—and shelter, in some cases—for birds and other animals. The plant flowers in May and June, with clusters of white to yellow flowers, depending on species. If pollination occurs, then berries—usually blue to black—form and ripen in the fall. In late winter and early spring, these berries provide food for birds, including northern cardinals. The seeds in the berries are deposited in the bird and animal droppings, which is one way the plant spreads. It can also spread by its long, narrow rhizomes, which run underneath but near the surface of the soil.

Difficult to control, Smilax is tough enough to grow back after being cut down or burned off by fire. Herbicides with the active ingredient glyphosate (e.g., Roundup ® or others) can help control this vine, but physically removing it—and as much of its rhizome system as possible—is often the most effective and simplest method of ridding your landscape of greenbrier. Just remember to wear gloves as a protection from its thorns.

For more information on controlling Smilax, call the Cooperative Extension office at 919 989-5380.

References:

- University of George College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences [http://www.caes.uga.edu/Publications/pubDetail.cfm?pk_id=7310](http://www.caes.uga.edu/Publications/pubDetail.cfm?pk_id=7310)
What’s In Season?

Cucumber
*Cucumis sativus*

No house salad could be complete without cucumbers. This delicious fruit, classified as a vegetable, is available now fresh from the garden. When harvesting the fruits need to be a deep green color. The length should be 6 – 8 inches for slicing cucumbers. Slicing cucumbers need to be picked 4 – 5 times a week to help the plant maintain a continuous production of fruit thought the season. Mature cucumbers not removed from the vine will stop production for the entire plant.

Too insure maximum results from your cucumber plants you want to provide 1 inch of water per week during the flowering a fruiting stage of plant development. This will insure that the cucumber fruit gets the required amount of water. Cucumbers are 95% water and so the timing and irrigation requirements are critical. Cucumbers have a low drought tolerance. Inadequate watering causes a reduction in yield and fruit quality causing them to become cracked or pointed on the ends.

Cucumbers can be cooked, baked frozen or enjoyed raw. Slicing cucumbers are great in salads and salsas, or on sandwiches and vegetable trays. Before eating or used in dishes they should be washed in cold water. They should last about a week if they are place in a plastic bag and then refrigerated.

**Recipe: Cucumber Yogurt Dip**

*Cool and creamy, this tangy cucumber dip flavored with garlic is the perfect complement to grilled meat and vegetables!*

**Directions**

Peel, seed, and grate one cucumber. Slice other cucumber and set aside. Mix yogurt, grated cucumber, sour cream, lemon juice, dill, and garlic in a serving bowl. Arrange tomatoes, cucumbers, broccoli, and carrots on a colorful platter. Serve with cucumber dip.

*Preparation Time: 10 minutes*

*Serves: 6*

*1 ½ Cups of Fruits and Vegetables per Serving*

Recipe from: [Fruits & Veggies More Matters](#)

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### September Garden Tasks

#### GENERAL INFORMATION

- Collect soil samples for testing, so that you’ll know how much fertilizer and lime to add this fall. Test your lawn, flower beds and vegetable garden. Testing should be done once every 3 years. We have FREE kits.
- Clean up and throw away any diseased plant material. Do not throw it in a compost pile. Leaving infected plant material on the plants or where it fell on the ground provides a source of re-infection for next year.

#### LAWN CARE

- Tip for fertilizing cool-season (i.e. fescue) lawns: Fertilize on Labor Day, Thanksgiving & Valentine’s Day. Fescue lawns are green & growing during the cool months of fall, winter, and spring. Use a slow-release fertilizer.
Plant fescue seed to fill in bare spots or rejuvenate your lawn. The best time to plant fescue seed is Sept. 15 - Oct. 15. Contact us for a publication on lawn care and renovation and get your soil samples in!!

- Overseed common Bermuda grass lawns with ryegrass in late September - to keep lawn green all year.
- Control winter weeds with a pre-emergent herbicide applied around mid-September on lawn and shrub plantings.

TREES, SHRUBS & ORNAMENTALS

- Prepare plants for dormancy. Plants need time in the fall to slow down & prepare for the winter, so do not apply nitrogen (N) fertilizer or prune after July. Consider applying potassium (K) fertilizers, which increase winter hardiness.
- Divide spring & summer-blooming perennials - such as daisies, daylilies, creeping phlox - that are overgrown. This is an easy way to enlarge your garden without purchasing more plants. Dig the plants, gently separate into smaller clumps & replant immediately. They'll have plenty of time to get re-established before next spring.
- Set out cool-weather annuals for winter color. In addition to pansies and ornamental cabbages, other cool-weather ornamentals such as Dianthus, snapdragons, dustymiller, and ornamental sage look great throughout the winter. Wait to plant spring bulbs till chillier fall weather arrives.
- Mulch Peppers. Be sure to mulch the plants to keep the roots cool and moist. Stake plants if you like, or you can allow them to tumble over onto ground that is covered with a thick blanket of hay, straw, or even newspapers.

LANDSCAPE IDEA

- Think ahead to next fall and consider plants that will provide autumn color. Trees such as ginkgo, red maple, southern sugar maple, Japanese maple, sourwood, crape myrtle and tulip poplar have outstanding autumn foliage color. The flowers of Sasanqua camellias and autumn-flowering chrysanthemums contribute much to the colorful autumn scene. Don't forget the brilliant red foliage of rabbiteye blueberries. The berries of pyracantha, nandina, viburnum, beautyberry and many hollies provide bright accents into winter. Look for interesting plants in the nurseries, and add them this fall.

HOUSEPLANTS

- Plan to bring houseplants and tropicals indoors when temperatures dip below 50 F.
- Move plants into partial shade for a week to condition them to lower light levels indoors.
- Prune them, if necessary, to a manageable size. Give them a good bath in soapy water or spray with insecticidal soap to keep insect pests from moving indoors with them.
- Give tropical plants as much light as possible once they are indoors.

VEGETABLES & FRUITS

- Start fall vegetables such as lettuce, spinach, collards, and cole crops to fill in spaces in the vegetable garden.