Some of you are gearing up for weed control, new plantings, or mulching but there are some of who have their thinking caps on and are trying to be creative with a problem area or an area that needs some beautification.

When we think of a house that is appealing and stands out, we think, curb appeal. Whether it has curb appeal during the day, by the waving interplay of varied color, size, shapes of plantings or at night by the way the light falls upon the house and its plantings. Here is how to get started.

When beginning a new space or reworking an existing space here are some elements to consider when planning the design:

**Do a Site Analysis:**

1) Choose a location, considering exposure to the sun in winter and summer and what the plants need; realizing plants will grow, producing more shade in years to come.

2) Slope of the land, how much water vs. sun absorption, for the selection of the plantings

3) What type of soil are you working with? Take a soil sample for testing.

4) What kinds of maintenance are you capable of doing or paying for?

5) Do you like color from flowering plants or do you like the interplay of different greens?

6) Take an inventory: Know your existing plants. Do you like them? Would you like to move them, or would trimming them or tuning them into topiaries be more desirable?

7) Would you like to create a sanctuary setting with architectural structures?

8) Do you intend to have lighting in the spaces – planning for the future lighting and burying electric cable is easier when done during the installation process before the landscape matures.
Once the area to design has been decided on, measure the area, include any permanent structures into the plot plan (initial drawing of the space) using a scale of ¼” or ½” = 1’. This scale will leave enough room on the paper. Use tracing paper to play around with conceptual designs (ideas of how the space might look), considering the answers to all the above questions. Try to determine, before going plant shopping, what the plantings needs are: ie, how much sunlight will the plants get, how much moisture is available to the site, how much maintenance will be needed, do the plants need to be deer resistant, etc. When finding plants you do like and intend to use, make a scaled, labeled template for them. This allows them to be moved around for easy changes, before deciding on the permanent design. Once you have a good conceptual design put together, make a copy of the plot plan where the plants can be drawn in and labeled.

If you are totally stuck, before hiring a professional, cut out pictures from magazines of designs that have the look you want. This will allow you to stay focused on the design when shopping for a designer.

**Featured Plant**

**Chinese Fringe Flower**

*Loropetalum chinensis* ‘Purple Pixie’

By Joanne King

If you are familiar with evergreen shrubs, the loropetalum is most known for its striking fuchsia flowers, purple-black leaves, weeping formation, and fast growing nature. Most cultivars can grow 10 feet tall and 6 feet wide, or more, although there a some that are smaller. If you are looking for an interesting plant that won’t consume your garden space, consider the ‘Purple Pixie’ cultivar.

Purple Pixie’ loropetalum is a dwarf shrub with rich purple foliage and fuchsia flowers, growing about 12-18 inches high and 3 feet wide. It can be used as an accent plant or groundcover with the same weeping characteristics of the larger loropetalum varieties. Purple Pixie will flower best in full sun, but grow fine in light or afternoon shade. These plants are hardy in Zones 7 through 9, and are considered evergreen or semi-evergreen. They are very heat and drought tolerant, have few pests, grow quickly and need little pruning. They perform best in well-drained soil, and are one of those plants that do not like ‘wet feet’.

Because of its size, it could also be used as a container plant or grown in an area where a cascade of foliage is desired. Its low and spreading growth habit makes it a good selection for a groundcover on slopes or embankments, as a border around the perimeter of beds or along paths and walks. So, if you are looking for a small-scale version of the more commonly seen variety, consider the ‘purple pixie’. Buy two! They’re small!

**Upcoming Events**

- **Shiitake Mushroom Production Workshop**
  March 5 9:00AM – 12:00PM Goldsboro
  Call (919) 731-1525

- **Tomato Grafting Workshop**, March 15, 6:30pm at Johnston Community College Arboretum. This workshop will give participants the experience of grafting common tomato varieties onto rootstock that is resistant to bacterial wilt, fusarium wilt, nematodes and other diseases. The cost for this workshop is $30. Pre-register by calling 209-2052 or 209-2184. Space is limited.

- **Rain Barrel Workshop** March 26 10:00AM-12:00PM at Johnston County Livestock Arena. Please pre-register by March 21 by calling 989-5380.
Yard Villians
Lawn Burrweed or Spurweed
Soliva sessils
By Shawn Banks

Lawn Burrweed can be a real pain in the foot (literally). This winter annual weed germinates in the fall (September and October) and continues to grow throughout the winter. In the spring the inconspicuous flowers appear where the leaf meets the stem. Soon after the flower fades the spine tipped seedpod becomes evident. The plants are usually very low growing and only reach a diameter of about six inches. The very fine texture of the leaves is because the leaves are deeply lobed like those of a cut-leaf Japanese maple. The leaves are arranged opposite each other on the short stems.

The best way to prevent this weed from becoming a problem in lawns is to encourage a healthy, thick turf through proper fertilization and mowing height. Lawn burrweed is most prevalent in areas of thin turf.

The two and three way lawn weed control herbicides are good options for controlling lawn burrweed in the home lawn. Application of these herbicides should be made when the temperatures are above 55°F on a sunny day. It may take two or three applications of the chemicals to completely control this weed. If repeat applications of herbicide are needed to control this weed, be sure to follow label directions for time intervals between applications.

For more specific information on controlling lawn burrweed contact the NC Cooperative Extension office in your county or visit the website http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/turfweedmgmt/WeedMgmt.aspx for specific management practices for the turf in your yard.

What’s in Season?
Asparagus
Asparagus officianalis

By Shawn Banks

This plant has the appearance of a fern, but is actually more closely related to lilies. It prefers to grow in well-drained soils where the pH is between 6.0 and 6.7. In clay soils it is advisable to generously amend the soil or even plant in a raised bed. Asparagus simply will not tolerate a wet soil.

Asparagus is harvested in the spring as the new shoots appear. In an established planting the harvest may last as long as 6 weeks or more. If you really like asparagus, 10 plants per person is the suggested planting. Well-maintained crowns will be productive for up to 15 years.

Asparagus can be cooked in several different ways. It can be fried, boiled, steamed, cooked in a microwave, or my favorite roasted. Here is the recipe for my favorite asparagus.

Ingredients
Asparagus

...
Bacon  
Olive Oil  
Salt and Pepper  
Parmesan Cheese

Directions
1. Pre heat oven to 400.
2. Wash and dry asparagus spears.
3. Drizzle spears with olive oil and then toss until coated evenly. Salt and pepper to taste.
4. Take a hand full of spears (4 to 8) and wrap them in a piece of bacon. Then place on a cookie sheet or a piece of parchment paper on a cookie sheet. Create one or two bundles for each person.
5. Place the cookie on the center rack in the oven and cook until bacon is crisp and asparagus is limp (about 10 minutes)
6. Place asparagus on a serving plate and sprinkle lightly with Parmesan cheese.

This dish is best when served warm.

MARCH GARDEN TASKS

LAWN MAINTENANCE
(or this month it's 'What do I do about weeds?')

• REMEMBER, the best defense against weeds is a healthy lawn. Learn how to care for your lawn throughout the year. Visit TurfFiles and click on Turf Tips to learn more about your lawn type. Keep it happy, healthy and weed free.
• Control existing weeds now, before they get large and/or set seed. A little work now will save a lot of trouble later.
• For yards with an established weed problem, use pre-emergent herbicides to kill seedlings as they germinate. Pre-emergent herbicides can be used to control crabgrass and other broadleaf weeds. Pre-emergent herbicides (according to label directions) should be applied while the forsythia is in bloom, late February to mid-March.
• Sharpen mower blades! A sharp blade cuts. A dull blade tears - making grass susceptible to diseases.

TREES, SHRUBS & ORNAMENTALS

• Divide fall-blooming perennials that are overgrown, such as asters, primrose, irises, violets, shasta daisies and mums. This is an easy way to enlarge your garden.
• Control leaf gall on azaleas and camellias. Leaf gall, a fungal disease, shows up as swollen leaves covered with a white powdery material. It is unsightly but generally not harmful to the plant. Pick off the affected leaves and dispose of them to avoid spreading the fungus.
• Do not compost diseased plant material.
• Remove protective winter mulch from tender perennials in early March to warm the soil and stimulate the plant to grow. Apply fresh mulch in April after perennials have emerged. Mulch helps with water conservation and weed control. [Link]
• Spring flowering shrubs such as quince, spirea, forsythia, azalea, Camellia japonica, Carolina Jessamine, viburnum, mock orange, weigela, Oriental magnolia and Indian Hawthorn flower on old growth. Prune them soon AFTER they bloom.
• Time for heavy, rejuvenation pruning of summer-blooming shrubs. Prune holly, Nandina and Beautyberry before new growth begins.
• Althea, Buddleia, Vitex, Crape Myrtle and Pomegranate can be pruned at the beginning of March to stimulate more flower production later.
• Prune roses before bud break. [http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-641.html](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-641.html)
• For a better show next spring, let the foliage of spring-flowering bulbs die back naturally.
• Are you fighting to keep grass growing under your trees? Or is there bare ground that erodes in heavy rains? Trees usually win in any competition for moisture and nutrients, and turfgrass is not well adapted to life in the shade. Mulch or living groundcovers are better choices than grass under large trees.
• Ground covers act as "living mulch." Low-maintenance, shade-tolerant ground covers include pachysandra, periwinkle (vinca), ajuga (bugleweed), liriope or mondo grass.
• A 2-3” thick layer of composted mulch conserves moisture, reduces erosion and provides nutrients to the tree. Keep mulch away from the trunk of the tree to discourage rodents and rot.
• Protect shade tree roots from injury. Remember that most of a tree's feeder roots are near the soil surface, under and just outside the tree canopy. If digging, foot traffic, or vehicles injure roots then damage to the tree can range from slowed growth (minor) to the death of the tree (major!). Some trees, such as dogwoods, are very susceptible to root damage; others, like maples, are more tolerant.

EDIBLES

• Plant cool-weather vegetable crops such as lettuce, mustard greens, sugar snap peas, radishes, onions, potatoes, spinach, and cole crops (such as cabbage and collards) as soon as soil can be worked. [http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8016.html](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8016.html)
• If a ball of soil crumbles when squeezed in your fist, the soil is workable.
• Take a soil test (we have free kits here) to see how much fertilizer to apply around pecan trees. It's time!
• Beets, broccoli, cauliflower and Chinese cabbage can be started by the third or fourth week of March.
• Now is the time to start seeds indoors for vegetables such as tomato, pepper, eggplant, and others to get a jump-start on the summer growing season.

WILDLIFE & INSECTS

• Put up martin and bluebird houses by mid-March to encourage these birds to nest. Learn how to build a blue bird nest box at [nabluebirdsociety.org/nestboxspecs.htm](http://nabluebirdsociety.org/nestboxspecs.htm) or [nabluebirdsociety.org/nestboxplans.htm](http://nabluebirdsociety.org/nestboxplans.htm)
• Clean out last year's birdhouse nesting materials to make them more attractive to house-hunting birds.

LANDSCAPE IDEAS

• Take photographs of your yard while your spring bulbs are blooming, so you can remember where to plant more bulbs in the fall.
• 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.