Upcoming Shiitake Mushroom Workshop

The N.C. Cooperative Extension Service and the Master Gardener Association will be holding an area Shiitake mushroom workshop for landowners who would like to grow Shiitake for additional income as an alternative agricultural crop or simply for personal consumption.

The demonstration workshop will be held **February 25, 2012** at the Swain Extension Center in Almond on 60 Almond School Rd. from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00p.m. For more information or to register contact Christy Bredenkamp Extension Horticulture Agent at phone # 828 488 3848 or e-mail christine_bredenkamp@ncsu.edu

The class will cover all aspects of Shiitake mushroom production and will include a "hands on" experience where individuals will inoculate and bring home their own logs. For demonstration purposes, we ask that you bring 2 logs preferably red, white or scarlet oak that are 3”–6” in diameter, 4 ft. long and with bark intact. Workshop fee is $10.00.

Managing Your Home Orchard

The NC Cooperative Extension Service will be holding Fruit Tree Workshops that will cover the basic cultural needs of apple, pear and peach trees. Learn more about site selection, the differences between dwarf, semi-dwarf and seedling trees, "proper soil conditions," pollination requirements, yearly fertility needs and tree spacing. Finally we will discuss the most common disease and insects problems and possible control options. For more information or to register for these free classes contact your local Extension Service at 586-4009 in Sylva or 488-3848 in Bryson City.

The following fruit tree workshops will be held in Swain and repeated in Jackson County.

**Monday February 27th at the Swain Extension Center on 60 Almond School Rd from 6:00-8:00p.m.**

**Monday March 5th at the Jackson Extension Center on 538 Scotts Creek Rd, Sylva from 2:00-4:00 p.m.**

Pruning Demonstration

A free "How To Train and Prune Your Fruit Tree" Workshop will be held on **Friday March 2nd from 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.** in Swain County only. We will meet at 9:30 a.m. in the parking lot in Bryson City on Main St. behind the Old Courthouse. From the parking lot we will depart at 9:45 a.m. for our pruning/training demonstration site in the Ela area. For more details or to register, you can contact the Swain Extension Center at 828 488-3848.
The month of January is when gardeners quite often have time to plan, organize and get a head start for the coming year! Even in the middle of winter, green enthusiasts contemplate last year’s frustrations and successes, along with changes to implement for a more satisfying gardening/landscape experience in 2012. Consider the following resolutions.

Join the 10% Campaign - The 10% Campaign is an opportunity for individuals, families, gardeners, restaurants, grocery stores and organizations to invest 10 percent of your food budget on foods produced within the State of North Carolina. Interested individuals can sign up for the campaign and track their growing and spending power on a weekly basis through an online interactive website: www.nc10percent.com.

Support Our Local Farmers – For those of you who don’t have gardens, buying at local farmer’s markets or signing up for a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a great way to support our local agriculture. CSA’s have become a popular way for consumers to buy local, seasonal food directly from a farmer.

Test Your Soil - Our soils team with life such as worms, insects, microbes and weeds along with vital nutrients for proper plant growth. Think about adding compost, manure or fertilizer to enrich your soil. Soil test! It’s important to establish a baseline for pH and nutrient levels. Soil testing (free in N.C.) allows gardeners to receive scientific recommendations based on the conditions in their yards about proper lime and fertilizer applications. Soil test boxes and instructions are available at your local Extension office.

Plan the Layout of Your Garden - Don’t plant crops from the same plant family in the same spot two years in a row. Consider the path of the sun so tall crops don’t shade shorter ones. Space plants a healthy distance from each other so outer leaves on mature plants will just touch those of their neighbors. If space is an issue consider square foot gardening or hook-up or start a community garden in your local neighborhood.

Go Organic - Take the plunge and transition this year. Use manure and plant varieties that are tolerant to Western North Carolina’s most common vegetable diseases. Consider farmscaping with wildflowers to keep the bad insect population to a minimum. Above all be patient and ask questions. It takes about 3 years to convert your conventional garden to a vibrant colorful organic garden.

Try Different Vegetables - Choose new varieties that do well in short seasons with cold, wet springs (cool season vegetables) or warm hot days (warm season vegetables). Also, consider disease resistance, tolerance of adverse conditions, the variety’s growth habit and length of harvest season.

Compost - Set up a compost bin in the backyard. Convert your yard clippings, leaves and fruit/vegetable waste into a wonderful soil amendment filled with beneficial microbes for your garden. There are a number of good compost bins available for purchase that include standard bins, rotating bins, and even worm composters. However, compost piles can be as simple as a 4ft by 4ft pile to as fancy as a 3 binned set-up made of pressure treated wood or concrete block.

Harvest All Year - Develop a plan to harvest vegetables for most of the year. Consider the timing of when to start an early spring garden with cool season vegetables, a second planting (May 15th) with warm season vegetables followed by a fall garden. Research and implement some season extension ideas such as low tunnels and cold frames.

Irrigation – Water deeply and early in the day only when necessary. Vegetables need about an inch of water a week (660-gallons/1000 sq. ft.). Conserve water by building soil organic matter and mulching crops to reduce soil moisture evaporation. When soil around plants is dry below the surface, soak the soil deeply with a drip or soaker hose. Consider upgrading your irrigation system.

Go Native – Deliberate on landscaping with native plants. Native plants are well adapted to their environment after years of natural selection. Their adaptations provide them with better drought and insect tolerance, which means less water and fewer pesticides.

Prune Wisely - Many homeowners prune fruit trees, vines and shrubs because they see others doing it without understanding why. There are specific reasons why to prune, how to prune and when to prune. Ask questions and do some research. Pruning correctly will increase flowers and fruit yields along with improving fruit quality and plant health.

**2012 Garden & Landscape Resolutions**

**Buy Local! Support Our Farmers & Gardeners!**

**Check Out Our Local CSA’s, Producer Stands & Farmer Markets**
Avoid Topping Trees – Topping weaken trees, causes decay, leads to sunburn from peeling bark, creates a hazard and inevitably decreases the tree’s lifespan. Instead of topping consider removing branches back to their point of origin. If a branch must be shortened, it should be cut back to a lateral that is large enough to assume the terminal role. This type of branch reduction helps to preserve the tree’s natural form. Another solution is to remove the tree and replace it with a species that is more appropriate for the site e.g., redbud or dogwood trees. For more information go to the International Society of Arboriculture at http://www.treesaregood.com/treecare/topping.aspx

Go Animal – In an effort to become more sustainable, consider raising chickens and bees along with your vegetable and herb garden, fruit trees, blueberries, brambles and grape vines. The benefits include eggs, meat and honey, along with manure for fertilizer and hard working pollinators for higher yields.

Lawns

- Think Spring! This is the month for the spring application of slow releasing fertilizer to the lawn.
- If you have bare spots that did not recover from drought, late February or early March would be a good time to put down grass seed.
- Check your lawn mower. Sharpen and tune it up if you missed this chore last fall.

Vegetables

- Soil Sample now if you haven’t done so already. The test is free you just need to sample and mail off to NCDA’s lab in Raleigh. You can pick up soil boxes at your local Extension office.
- Start Planning this years garden. Sketch the garden and fill in rows for rotating crops and planning space.
- Check notes from last year to see which varieties performed well and which are not worth planting again. Start shopping for seeds at garden centers and seed catalogs.
- Go ahead and start planting English and edible-pod peas, spinach, kale, onions and a few other cold hardy crops in late February through March.
- Plant an asparagus bed.
- Mow cover crops and turn under if the soil is not too wet to work.

Fruits

- Prune grape vines. The sap may drip from cuts during warmer temperatures but not too worry.
- Check and repair your trellises for grape vines and blackberries.
- Mature apple and pear trees can be pruned, but do not prune young fruit trees, peaches or plums before March unless the buds are swollen and ready to flower.

Upcoming Blueberry Seminar

The N.C. Cooperative Extension Service is holding an area seminar on "How to Establish and Maintain Your Blueberries" on Thursday March 8th from 2:00 p.m. until 5:30 p.m. in Sylva at the Jackson Extension Center on 538 Scotts Creek Rd.

Bill Cline NCSU Blueberry Specialist will cover site selection and preparation, blueberry fertility needs, pests and their control, choosing the right cultivars, and harvesting. This free class will cover all aspects of blueberry production and will include a "hands on" pruning demonstration at a nearby site in Cullowhee. For demonstration purposes, we ask that you bring your own pruners and or loppers. For more information or to register contact Christy Bredenkamp Extension Agriculture Agent at phone # 828 586 4009. or e-mail Christine_Bredenkamp@ncsu.edu.
The Swain County Cooperative Extension is now taking orders for 3-4 foot tall apple, pear, and peach trees along with 3 year old blueberry, 2 year old grape, and thornless blackberry varieties. Prices are $13.00 for the apple, pear and peach trees and $8.00 for the grapes, blueberries, and blackberries. All plant material will arrive bare-rooted. You can pick-up an order form or go online to http://swain.ces.ncsu.edu/content/4HFruitTreeBerryPlantSale

Mail completed Order Form and payment to the:
Swain County 4-H Fund
PO Box 2329
Bryson City, NC 28713

Orders and checks must be received by Monday, February 20, 2012.

The shipment will arrive at the Swain office on Wednesday, March 7th. Our office will call you immediately upon their arrival and work with you on picking up your order.

All sales and purchases are final - The quality of the plants needs to be evaluated by the purchaser at the time of pick-up.

Sincerely,
Christy Bredenkamp, Extension Agent
Agriculture-Horticulture

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

Jackson County Center
538 Scotts Creek Road, Suite 205
Sylva, NC 28779