PLANT OF THE MONTH FOR MAY,
By Marty Finkel, Kerr Lake Master Gardener

Blue-Eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium angustifolium*) is commonly found since it is native from Southern Canada into much of the eastern U.S. Although not a true grass, it is easy to distinguish from because its leaves are flattened and sword-shaped, usually in the form of a fan. They have medium-blue small flowers, some with yellow eyes. The plants are about 10” to 14” tall with ¾” to 1” flower clusters, and they bloom in May (this year the middle of April into May). They are easy to grow with no problems and blend in with everything. Put them near a path since they tend to get lost in the foliage of other plants if put farther back into the bed or border. They do well in partial shade or full sun soil with good drainage. If they really like their space, they can self-sow and become weedy. There are related Western species, and there are many hybrids in colors of sky blue, mauve, white, or brownish. Some of the hybrids have much larger flowers and some do not reseed. Occasionally the flowers are yellow. Argentine blue-eyed grass, native to Argentina and Chile is one of the larger and more ornamental species (*S. striatum*) with 9 to 12 creamy yellow flowers on an upright spike, similar to a gladiolus. They make large clumps, due to their spreading rootstock, but they are not invasive.

CHECKLIST FOR MAY,
By Mary Jane Bosworth, Kerr Lake Master Gardener

*A garden is the best alternative therapy.*  
*Germaine Greer*

- Sitting on the porch the other day, I heard a small jet go by, reminding me to set out the hummingbird feeders.
- Azaleas, climbing roses, camellias and rhododendrons can be pruned after they have finished blooming.
- Fertilize crepe myrtles with 1 cup of 8-8-8 per plant to get abundant summer bloom.
- Plant tender warm season bulbs like cannas, caladiums, gladiolus and dahlias.
- Fast growing clematis should be pruned and trained to prevent it from becoming an unmanageable mess.
- Prepare for dry weather by mulching.
- Control weeds by using a pre-emergent herbicide.
- Now is the time to plant Bermuda, centipede, St. Augustine and zoysia grasses.
- Most warm season lawns can be fertilized in May.
- Many annuals will bloom longer if deadheaded – pinch off flowers right after they finish blooming.
Prune out fire blight damaged wood on your fruit trees. Sterilize your pruners between cuts.

All the warm and hot weather vegetables can be planted now.

Get *Strawberries in the Home Garden*, HIL 8205, [www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8205.html](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8205.html) to find the needed steps to renovate your strawberry bed.

When cool season crops (broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, and green, sugar snap, and snow peas) begin to mature, harvest every couple of days for best quality. Hot weather can cause these crops to be over mature very quickly.

Mulch tomatoes and peppers, and keep them evenly moist to reduce blossom end rot.

Extend your sweet corn harvest by successive plantings every two to three weeks or by planting early, mid, and late maturing varieties all at the same time. Make repeated plantings of vegetables based on space availability and your likes.

Control annual weeds by mulching and hand-weeding.

For information on fertilizing, both preplanting and side dressing, get *Home Vegetable Gardening* booklet AG-06 from the internet or the Extension Service center.*

Check your garden every day or two to spot and solve problems early.

If you are planning to raise your own transplants for a fall garden, you need to start seeds in June to have plants ready to set out in late July and early August. Plants to try include Brussel Sprouts, Broccoli, Cauliflower, and Cabbage.*

For more information on planning a fall garden, see *Growing a Fall Vegetable Garden*, HIL 8001, [www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8001.html](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8001.html). For information on fall-winter gardening with variety suggestions, visit the websites of seed companies. Note that some of the recommended varieties are not commonly available at local seed sources so you will need to seek internet or mail order sources for these.

*See Feb. 11, *The Garden Path*, Garden To Do for more web links.

**INTERESTING TID-BITS FOR MAY**

By Marty Finkel, Kerr Lake Master Gardener

Tony Avent (who could be the South’s most infamous plantsman with the publication of a front page article titled “Gardening Catalog Sets Off Firestorm” in the February 24th edition of the Raleigh News and Observer) was a member of the technical review committee for the recently updated USDA Plant Hardiness Zone map. This committee was composed of nurserymen, crop researchers, foresters, climatologists, and others. The committee held a number of meetings at the USDA headquarters in Maryland and held many subsequent meetings by phone. If you would like to read about this fascinating project, you can find a detailed account in the January 27, 2012 Plant Delights Newsletter. And if you are curious about the “…Firestorm” article in which death and other threats were the result of the satirical catalog covers (especially the 2012 Spring one), enter News and Observer in a search engine, click on News, type Tony Avent catalog covers in the search box, and click on search. It will appear.

The Perennial Plant Association has named *Brunnera macrophylla* ‘Jack Frost’ the 2012 Perennial of the Year. It lights up a shade garden with its large, silvery leaves and blue forget-me-not like flowers in mid- to late spring.

Put May 6 on your calendar to attend the JCRA Gala in the Garden. There is no better way to spend a Sunday afternoon than among such
COOL plants, all for sale! Call 919-513-3826 or visit http://www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum/calendar/2012/05-may/gala/gala.php.

A naturally ball-shaped (not necessary to prune) shrub and tree are in the trade: Mr. Bowling Ball arborvitae (Thuja occidentalis ‘Bobazam’) maintains its 2½ foot round shape without trimming and is good as a specimen or planted in multiples. The Lollipop dwarf crabapple (Malus ‘Lollizam’) is top-grafted and naturally forms a round head – no need for trimming. It has fragrant, prolific white blooms in spring and tiny red fruits in the fall. It is slow growing and a good candidate for containers as well as in-ground. From the March/April 2012 Horticulture magazine.

The flowering dogwood (Cornus florida) is one of the most popular landscape trees for gardeners and developers. In North Carolina, it brings between $5 million and $6 million annually in retail sales. However, it is susceptible to a couple of disabling if not fatal, diseases, one of which is powdery mildew (which appeared in this state less than 2 decades ago). The other is Discula destructiva, commonly known as dogwood anthracnose. The good news is that Dr. Tom Ranney, a horticulture scientist at NCSU’s Mountain Horticultural Crops Research and Extension Center near Asheville, has developed a highly resistant dogwood, NCJAM6. There are other “disease resistant” dogwoods on the market, but Dr. Ranney said nothing can compare to NCJAM6. The first specimens have been sent to a local nursery this spring for testing. If they live up to the expectation, NCJAM6 could revolutionize dogwood breeding.

The entire article, “New Trick for Dogwood”, by John Murawski, can be found in the March 8 Raleigh News and Observer.

HERB OF THE MONTH,
By Edna Gaston, Kerr Lake Master Gardener

Mullein (Verbascum Thapsus)

Height: 8-9 ft.
Flowers: flower spikes covered with yellow flowers. Blooming from June to September
Propagation: seeds, germination 10 days, self-sows freely
Growing conditions: poor, dry soil, prefers open areas
Cultivation: Biennial but unless seed head is removed, ground will be covered with seedlings. The area where it grows should not be cultivated.
Uses: flower stalk can be dipped in oil and used as a taper. Historically it was used in various medicinal remedies. Several species of birds eat its seeds.

General Information: This plant has quite a few interesting names – Blanket-leaf, old man’s flannel and grandmother’s flannel (because of its soft leaves), Candlewick (from one of its uses), Jacob’s staff (referencing its height - including the flower it reached about 8’ in the field near my house), While the leaves are rather large, sometimes 16 to 18” in length, smaller at the top, ending in a rosette at the base, this plant will overwhelm a small garden. But it is striking in a larger area, especially one featuring grey plants. Its leaves are so very soft, very similar to Lamb’s Ear. Rarely do I see it offered for sale but it is a quite common sight along the roadside. It is also found in areas just recently disturbed. Stand back, it is a rapid grower.

Mullein is not native to the United States. As with most herbs it was imported. In this case it arrived from Europe. There have been frequent
references to the association of Mullein with magical powers. When I was an historic interpreter, I used mullein leaves to create a yellowish natural dye.

This plant is not always a weed. When placed in an area where it can naturalize, it is a delightful addition to the garden.

Additional Information:

WELCOME GARDEN MAINTAINED BY THE KERR LAKE MASTER GARDENERS
By Cece Powell

Mrs. Judy Choplin watering the welcome garden after we planted new plants...this is a Welcome garden for the Vance County Extension Center and is maintained by the Kerr Lake Master Gardeners. The public is encourage to stop by and view the garden with plants and their names on labels.

Recommendations for the use of agricultural chemicals are included in this publication as a convenience to the reader. The use of brand names and any mention or listing of commercial products or services in this publication does not imply endorsement by North Carolina Cooperative Extension nor discrimination against similar products or services not mentioned. Individuals who use agricultural chemicals are responsible for ensuring that the intended use complies with current regulations and conform to the product label. Be sure to obtain current information about usage regulations and examine a current product label before applying any chemical. For assistance, contact your county Cooperative Extension Agent.

North Carolina State University and North Carolina A & T State University commit themselves positive action to secure equal opportunity regardless of race, color, creed, national origin, religion, sex, age, veteran status, or disability. In addition the two universities welcome all persons without regard to their sexual orientation. North Carolina State University and North Carolina A & T State University, U. S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments cooperating.

Pictures courtesy of JC Raulston Arboretum, Marty Finkel, Edna Gaston and Cece Powell