The Garden Path
April 2010

ROSEMARY-HERB OF THE MONTH
By Edna Gaston, Master Gardener
A.K.A Ladybug

Rosmarinus officinalis - Rosemary
Height: 5 - 6 ft.
Flowers: late winter to early spring, pale blue
Propagation: cuttings or layering
Growing conditions: full sun, well-drained soil
Cultivation: plant where it is to remain, it does not like to be moved. Since an alkaline soil is preferred, add wood ashes, egg shells or lime if the soil is very acidic.
Uses: can be cut anytime a sprig is desired. Use as a hair rinse for brunettes, excellent flavoring especially for meats and many vegetables. Beautiful landscape plant as there are now several species and varieties available. Rosemary will keep moths away from clothes. It imparts a nice, refreshing fragrance in the home.

HISTORY:
Rosemary is for remembrance according to many books on the language of flowers. The ancient Greeks believed that encircling the head in a garland of Rosemary would improve the memory – certainly won’t hurt anything and is definitely worth the try!

Even if Rosemary is used for no other purpose than a specimen in the garden – plant it. Put in a container by the entrance, it can be pruned into a very attractive conical shape. Plant on a slope or top of a wall and let another variety drape over to soften the hard edge. Since most varieties don’t grow over 6 feet tall, it works nicely under windows. In this area Rosemary is an evergreen with beautiful needlelike leaves. Whatever the need, there is a Rosemary. Once it’s in the garden it will not be forgotten!

Additional Information:
Plant of the month, species tulips
By Marty Finkel, Master Gardener

Are you tired of planting tulip bulbs every year or so? Then try the species tulips. The information in this column is condensed from an article written in 1994 by Sherry Rindels, Dept. of Horticulture, Iowa State University. Most species tulips grow just 4 to 12” tall and naturalize well, spreading by self-sown seed and stolons. Many have multiple blooms per stem (some up to 7) as well as beautiful mottled gray/blue foliage.

They require full sun and well-drained, almost gravelly soils that drain quickly between rains. If your soil is not fast-draining, amend an area several inches wider and deeper than the bulbs will occupy with gravel, and plant 5 to 8” deep. Several bulb catalogs offer species tulips. They are truly March and April jewels. Here are a few species to try: *Tulipa batalinii*, *T. clusiana*, *T. greigii*, *T. kaufmanniana*, *T. linifolia*, *T. pulchella*, *T. saxatilis*, *T. sylestris*, *T. tarda*, and *T. turkestanica*.

Tulip photos courtesy of Brent and Becky’s Bulbs

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ROSE TIPS
By Heidi Moore, Master Gardener, Warren County

Now that all your hybrid roses are pruned, knock-out roses are trimmed and rambling roses are prepared for onset of growth and flowering, it is time to fertilize and mulch your roses.

Roses, like many other flowering shrubs, grow best when you use a fertilizer whose nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium exist in an approximate 1:2:1, 1:2:2, or 2:3:1 ratio. The relatively lower proportion of nitrogen keeps the plants from producing lush leaves at the expense of flowers.

Some organic and inorganic fertilizers are known as slow release fertilizers because they release their nutrients over a long period, usually three to nine months. A good way to determine whether a particular fertilizer is the slow-release type would be to look at the label percentage of water insoluble nitrogen (WIN). If the WIN number is 30 or more, the fertilizer is considered slow release. Labels will also indicate how long the product will last. If you only want to apply fertilizer once a year, choose a product that will remain active throughout your growing cycle.

When considering fertilizers for container roses, keep in mind that a periodic application of liquid fertilizers that are mixed with water is a better alternative. These water soluble fertilizers are fast acting, releasing nutrients quickly. Dry fertilizers can be leached away before they have a chance to act due to the necessity of frequent watering.

Proper timing is essential when applying fertilizer so as to supply needed nutrients when the roses need them most. Fertilizing should begin with the first signs of growth in early spring. A yearly soil test will tell you the nutrient content of your soil.
and what fertilizing regime is best for you. (Check with your local Extension Service for more information regarding soil testing.)

Large shrub roses such as knock-outs, old garden roses and climbers need more fertilizer than hybrid teas; about twice as much per plant. One of the most important steps in fertilizing is to make sure your plants are fully hydrated before and after fertilizing. Watering the day before will protect plants from damage to tender root hairs or foliage and watering after helps move nutrients into the root zone.

Always follow the directions on the label regarding amount to apply as they will vary with formulation. Too much of anything, even manure, can be potentially detrimental to your plant’s health.

After you have completed your fertilizing, the addition of 3-4 inches of mulch will prove beneficial in several ways. NC usually has hot summers and a long growing season, so the mulch will help to keep the soil evenly moist, insulate it from rapid temperature fluctuation and reduce erosion by wind and water. A protective covering will also aid with weed control. Good natural mulches include tree bark, leaf mold, compost, and pine needles. My preference is to use shredded hardwood mulch as it breaks down slowly and works as a great supplement to the soil.


GARDEN TO DO – APRIL 2010
FRUITS & VEGGIES
By Carl Shafer, Master Gardener

Maintain your spray program for apples, nectarines, peaches, and plums. Follow label instructions and observe waiting times before harvest. See NC Agricultural Chemicals Manual for more information.

Apples, nectarines, peaches, and pears need to be thinned to produce the best crop of full sized fruit. Fruit should be thinned by the time they are nickel size so that they are spaced 4 to 8 inches apart along the branch.

If you have blueberries, cherries, or strawberries, have bird netting ready unless you want to share your crop.

Avoid working in your garden when the soil is wet. A late planting of cool season vegetables can be tried in the first half of the month. As long as we do not have an early hot spell, you will get a late harvest.

If possible, avoid planting related vegetables in the same location more often than once every three years. This will help prevent the buildup of insect and disease problems.

“Warm weather” vegetables (Green beans, sweet corn, cucumbers, melons, squash, and tomatoes) can be planted after the average last frost date in mid – April. Wait until May for “Hot weather” vegetables (Lima beans, eggplant, okra, southern peas, peppers, and sweet potatoes). See Home Vegetable Gardening AG-06 for fertilizing and pest control recommendations.


Interesting Tidbits for April 2010
By Marty Finkel, Master Gardener

Crabapples are extraordinarily beautiful trees – however, as a rule, they have been so plagued with disease and insect problems that many people have given up planting them. There is a broad range of improved cultivars now, and one, Malus ‘Sugar Tyme’ is profiled in the April 2010 issue of Horticulture magazine. The author, Greg Hinkle, says it is outstanding in flowering, fruit, and foliage, and is highly
ornamental. Its mature height is 15 to 18 feet tall with a strong, symmetrical branching habit. Grow it in full sun to part shade in moist, well-draining soil.

As you know, witch hazels usually grow to about 15’ to 20’ tall by that big around, so not everyone has the space for them. This is a real shame because they are such a colorful and fragrant addition to the late winter/early spring landscape. A column in the Vol. 42, No. 5 March 2010 issue of the Avant Gardener newsletter suggests they are easily kept to 5’ x 5’ by annual pruning. “A British expert advises cutting back the previous season’s growth to two buds, doing this faithfully every year after flowering.” The result is “a dense plant which will flower on spurs down to its base”. Green Spring Gardens in Alexandria, Va. has 101 specimens in their collection and they chose a dozen of their favorites. So if you’re looking for a Hammelis, you might select from among these: *H. mollis* ‘Kort’s Yellow’ and ‘Wisley Supreme’, *H. vernalis* ‘Christmas Cheer’ and ‘Sandra’, *H. virginiana* ‘Harvest Moon.’ Seven *H. x intermedia* cvs are listed: ‘Aphrodite’, ‘Aurora’, ‘Brotzman’s No. 1’, ‘Feuerzauber’ (‘Fire Charm’), ‘Jelena’, ‘Luna’, and ‘Orange Peel’. If you’re interested in the colors and fragrances of these, try Google for descriptions.

Look for this improved Nandina – ‘Flirt’ has deep red new growth and maintains superior color through the summer, unlike similar varieties. Grow in full sun to part shade, well-drained soil. Size: 12-24” tall by 14-20” wide.

‘River Mist’ variegated sea oats is a drought and deer proof ornamental grass with 4 seasons of interest. It’s a green and white variation of Northern Sea oats. Grow in light shade. Size: 3’ tall by 2-3’ wide.

Late winter/early spring fragrances:

When weather permits, working in the garden from late January through March, these fragrances are very noticeably different as one works from place to place: Honey (Edgeworthia chrysantha), spice (several *Prunus mume* -- Japanese flowering apricot), citrus (*Daphne odora* and *Lonicera fragrantissima* – winter honeysuckle), and “flower” (*Sarcocca hookeriana* – Sweetbox).

[Agent’s note: Some sources list nandina as a potentially invasive plant]

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