PLANT OF THE MONTH
Flame willow (Salix ‘Flame’)  
by Marty Finkel, Master Gardener

Here’s competition for the colored bark dogwoods – a willow with glowing yellow to orange-red bark in winter. This willow will grow to about 15 to 20’ tall with a 10 to 15’ spread, but the best bark color, as with the dogwoods, will be on new growth. The one in the photo is at the J.C. Raulston Arboretum in Raleigh, and it is cut back every year. The trunk is quite large, and as can be seen in the picture, the tree (or large shrub) has a more or less oval habit with compact, dense branching. The leaves last into the fall after leaves of many other trees have fallen, and they are a beautiful golden yellow. Plant in full sun for best color and in average garden soil. It shows to great advantage against evergreens such as hollies and with blue-hued plants such as its photo companion, the Colorado blue spruce (Picea pungens ‘Hoopsii”).

PEST OF THE MONTH:  
Houseplant Pests  
by Cynthia Dickinson, Master Gardener

Due to the time of year and our current weather, most of the pests we see, or not see, are on our houseplants. Identifying and planning the best course of action to remove them is vital. A non-chemical method of removing them should be first on your list. Cleaning, whether wiping down, or using a blast of water to remove the pest may work best. Increasing the humidity will also help since most of our homes are dryer this time of year. Physically picking or rubbing them off, or using sticky traps is also very effective. Isolate an infected plant, if possible, and treat until all signs of the pest are gone. Ensure you check any other plants brought into the home. This should be done for all newly purchased plants, and those you bring in during the winter months. Isolating new plants for one month will give you the time needed to treat, if pests are present. If the infestation on a particular plant is too great, you may need to dispose of it altogether.

Be diligent and constantly monitor your houseplants. Some common houseplant pests are Spider mites, Greenhouse whitefly, brown soft scale, mealybug, cyclamen mite, and fungus gnats. When researching on the
If you have not completed pruning your rose bushes, now is the time. Transplanting and pruning by the middle of March will enable your plants to get a strong beginning to the new growing season. Be sure to prune your hybrid tea roses down to within 12-16 inches from the bud union, and eliminate any inside growing canes. This will allow for good air circulation, and to encourage your roses to put out new growth from either the bud union or low on the stronger canes. If your hybrids are left unpruned because time didn’t allow, or your plants had already shown signs of strong growth and you didn’t have the heart to cut them back, they will probably have a decent amount of roses the first blooming. If left unattended, the second and third blooming will become weak and very unruly. Keep in mind that you will be able to trim your bushes back after the first bloom to encourage a stronger growth for the remainder of the growing season.

Ramblers flower on old wood, so it is best to do any pruning after the first blooming. Bush roses and knock-outs should also just be shaped, and some of the inner growth removed to allow for good air circulation; This will help with insect and disease control. It is also recommended that you spray all your rose bushes with a fungicide after pruning is complete. This will help to prevent early onset of disease that has wintered over.

Before adding fertilizer, be sure to have your soil tested so you will know exactly what kind of fertilizer is recommended for your planting area. Keep in mind that an ideal PH is 6.5, and no less than 6 hours of direct sun is necessary for strong rose growth and lots of flowers.

**INTERESTING TID-BITS**

by Marty Finkel, Master Gardener

If we want to be on the cutting edge of the latest trend in landscaping, according to several experts such as plant hunter Dan Hinkley, Linda Guy from Novalis, Dan Heims of Terra Nova Nurseries, Nicholas Staddon of Monrovia (who identified the trend several years ago), Rick Schoellhorn of Proven Winners, and Tony Avent of Plant Delights, we will concentrate on the minimalist garden. The emphasis is moving to the landscape where large plants dominate and simplicity reigns. Mixed plants container gardening is falling from favor as landscape plants are back in style, for example, one large Cordyline ‘Burgundy’ in a large blue-glazed ceramic pot set on a layer of black or gray pebbles (a favorite of Nicholas Staddon). One could use many such plants with stature, such as a large banana plant, instead of the Cordyline. Another part of the trend is the use of succulents, which is taking Europe by storm, and several new ones are being introduced. Trends in breeding include thicker leaves that are more pest resistant, selecting for colored foliage and/or berries for shrubs to extend seasonal interest, as well as breeding for less water and fertilizer requirements. These experts predict this trend will dominate the gardening world in the next five years. (Compiled from “Plants and Trends for 2009” by Doreen G. Howard in the Jan./Feb. issue of The American Gardener magazine)

Camillia Show March 4 starting at 10 a.m. at the J.C. Raulston Arboretum in Raleigh. Plant sales also. (919) 467-6876
Here is a collection of useful and interesting garden websites sent to me by Vinnie Simeone, one of the leaders of the Garden Vistas garden trips:

www.plantingfields.org
http://www.uga.edu/athensselect/
www.plantideas.com
www.awaytogarden.com
www.suzybalesgarden.com
www.qnet.com/~johnsonj/
www.mailordergardening.com
www.plantfinder.com
http://www.armitageimages.net/
www.vincentsimeone.com
http://www.cce.cornell.edu/

GARDEN TO DO:
ORNAMENTALS
by Onda Marable, Master Gardener

• Start making lists of annuals and biennials you are thinking of using this year. Take the list with you when you go to the garden center.
• To stop weeds this year, think about using pre-emergent.
• Summer flowering bulbs, such as crocosmia, dahlia, gladiolus and lilies, can be planted after the threat of freezing temperatures has passed this month.
• Don’t forget your houseplants. Now is a good time to start repotting and moving to larger pots if needed. Prepare them now so they will be ready to move outdoors for the summer.
• Don’t forget to set aside some of your bounty to share with your neighbors.
• This is a good month to get ready for spring: remove thatch from lawns using a steel-tine rake.
• Remove winter mulch from subtropicals (ginger, crinum and lantana). Clean area before applying new mulch.
• Remove old foliage from hellebores as the new growth surfaces.

• Perennials to divide and transplant this month include: asters, astilbes, ajuga, oxalis, bleedingheart, phlox, hostas, shasta daisy, daylily and coral bells.
• Don’t forget the birds, feed and give clean water. We need them to take care of the garden pests that will be arriving soon.
• Cut back ornamental grasses, but do not cut into the quick of the plant.
• Now is the time to fertilize shrubbery and early perennials such as daylily, shasta daisies and amaryllis.
• Shrub that blooms on new wood, such as abelia and gardenia, should be cut back and shaped this month.

GARDEN TO DO:
FRUITS & VEGGIES
by Carl Shafer, Master Gardener

• Finish pruning fruit trees. (1)
• Start your fruit spray schedule before bloom. Do not spray during bloom – save the bees!

See the NC Chemical Manual for spray schedules. For a small number of trees it is easier to use a Home Orchard Mix which contains an insecticide, a fungicide and a miticide. Follow the label instructions. (1)

• Continue to plant cool season vegetables. See the Vegetable Garden Planting Guide for recommended varieties and planting dates. (1)
• Set out broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower plants about mid month, or when you can get them. (1)
• For interesting salads, try a Mesclun mix. Sow a short wide row every
week or so and shear off when they reach about 3 inches tall. It should regrow so that you can get several cuttings.

- The last frost date is mid to late April, so wait to put warm season crops in the garden.

(1) See the FEB 09 issue of *The Garden Path* for web links on these topics.

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