Planning a Backyard Orchard

By Paul McKenzie, Extension Agent, Vance and Warren Counties

If you have ever dreamed of picking fruit from your own backyard orchard, now is the time to start planning. While most fruit trees are best planted in late fall or early winter, you need to start getting your ducks in a row now. Yes many gardeners buy fruit trees on impulse, enticed by the pretty pictures on the plant tags. This can be fun and may lead to a successful crop. However, the gardener who starts with planning and research is more likely to reap a bountiful harvest.

The first step in planning an orchard is selecting a crop, and that should be based on how much effort you are willing to expend. Figs and blueberries can be grown with minimal fuss, but other crops will require more extensive maintenance. Peaches and apples, for example, require regular pruning and pest control sprays to ensure a quality crop. Muscadine grapes have few pest problems, but skillful pruning is needed to keep them productive.

The location for your orchard should be based on three factors: soil quality, sunlight, and access to water. Low-lying wet areas should be avoided. Poor soil will require amendments to improve drainage and fertility. A minimum of 6 hours of full sun is critical, and regular irrigation will be needed, especially during establishment.

Go ahead and collect a soil sample now to submit for analysis. The soil analysis lab is not busy this time of year, so you will get the results quickly. Lime and phosphorous can be added as soon as you receive the results, as they need time to react with the soil.

Once crops and a site have been selected, it is time to research varieties. Certainly personal tastes are an important factor, but equally important are pollination requirements, disease resistance, and adaptability to Piedmont North Carolina. Call the County Extension Center for suggestions, or visit the following website: http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/ag28.html.

Keep in mind that pears, peaches, nectarines, apples, and plums are normally grafted crops, which means the root system from one tree is attached to the top portion of another. This gives you a root system that is adapted to our soils and climate, while the fruit meets the criteria mentioned above.

Rootstock selection also determines the mature size of the tree. Backyard orchardists should give serious thought to using dwarfing rootstocks for a number of reasons. First, they take up less space. Second, you can plant more varieties in the same amount of space. Third, and perhaps most importantly, maintenance activities such as spraying, pruning, fruit thinning, and harvesting are significantly easier.

Also keep in mind that, in almost all cases, cross-pollination is highly beneficial. This means you need to plant more than one variety of each crop. Otherwise, yields will be much lower and, in some cases, nearly zero.

Successful backyard fruit production takes careful planning and regular maintenance. The rewards, however, can be abundant.
JUNE TO DO!
Landscaping & Lawn Care
By Onda Marable, Master Gardener, Vance County

- Fertilize all trees and shrubs with a slow-release fertilizer that will last 2 to 3 months.
- Check your irrigation system for leaks. A timer, if your system does not have one, would be a good investment. It will save time and water.
- To stop the fall flop of chrysanthemums, Joe Pye weed, sunflowers and other fall blooming plants cut back by half their current growth. Remember some of these bloomers are easy to root. Give rooting a try and share with friends and family.
- Stake any summer blooming plants that will flop because of height and weight of the blooms.
- Check the foliage of your spring bulbs. Only cut back if the foliage is brown or yellow. Remember these bulbs are storing energy for next year’s blooms.
- Remember that most plants need at least an inch of water per week during the hot summer months. Water if Mother Nature does not provide.

Fruits and Veggies
By Carl Shafer, Master Gardener, Vance County

- Check previous months TO DO lists as many items continue to be relevant.
- If you have had problems with brown rot in the past on your fruits, continue with fungicide sprays. Always follow label instructions.
- Prune out fire blight damaged wood on your fruit trees. Sterilize your pruners between cuts.
- Make repeated plantings of vegetables based on space availability and your likes.
- Control annual weeds by mulching and hand weeding.
- If you are planning to raise your own transplants for a fall garden, you need to start seeds in June to have plants ready for setting out in early August. Plants to try include: Brussel Sprouts, Broccoli, Cauliflower, and Cabbage.

PESTS!!
By Cynthia Dickinson, Master Gardener, Warren County

The Japanese beetle is approximately ½ inch long, shiny, metallic green and with coppery brown wings. As we dig in our gardens, the small white beetle grub is the first sign we see of this insect. The grubs are about 1 inch long when mature. First reported in the United States in 1916, Japanese beetles are now found throughout the Eastern US.

The beetle grubs burrow through the soil consuming roots. Areas of dead grass may appear where there is a large population of this pest. Populations rarely reach economic threshold levels for the home lawn (10 grubs per square foot before damage becomes an issue). Soil insecticides for grub control are available, but rarely needed or justified for the homeowner. Killing all grubs in your lawn will not protect your shrubs from the feeding adult beetles.

The beetles feed on over 275 kinds of shade and fruit trees. Some of their favorites are roses, crape myrtles, grapes and fruit trees. Adults emerge as early as May in Eastern North Carolina, with peak time being mid-July. Soon after emerging, they lay 40 to 60 eggs, about 2 to 3 inches deep in moist soil.
Control of the Japanese beetle is a daunting task for the gardener. Carbaryl (Sevin), malathion and imidacloprid (Merit) are good choices for use against this insect. Products containing Pyrethroid are slightly more persistent. Covering roses and shrubs with light netting can give extra protection. Handpicking is a chemical free control, yet can become an hourly battle to make any difference. Japanese beetle traps may catch up to 75% of the beetles that approach them, however ensure you place the traps away from the plants you are trying to protect. One trap may lower the population by 30% per acre. The traps must be emptied every one to two days to prevent them from rotting and releasing ammonia, which is a repellent to the beetles.

Recommendations for insecticides approved for control of these insects in home lawns can be found under the “White Grubs” listing in the Insect Control in Home Lawns section of the NC Agricultural Chemicals Manual.

PLANT OF THE MONTH

By Marty Finkel, Master Gardener, Granville County

SWAMP CYRILLA, LEATHERWOOD

CYRILLA RACEMIFLORA

You can see an example of this beautiful large shrub/small tree in bloom at the J.C. Raulston Arboretum in Raleigh later this month, as it blooms in late June/early July. It usually grows 10 to 15’ high and wide, but there is a smaller form, c. Racemiflora ‘Graniteville.’ Michael Dirr, in his manual of woody landscape plants, describes it as “..... Usually a rather sprawling/spreading rounded shrub of great beauty; develops a stout, eccentric trunk from which numerous, wide-spread branches arise; branches contorted and twisted.” In the wild, it is found in swamps, ranging from Virginia to Florida, also the West Indies and eastern South America. This deciduous shrub is best grown in full sun to part shade in a high organic, moist but well drained, acid soil. The site of my ‘Graniteville’ meets the soil type requirement but fails in the moisture category (rather dry soil with tree root competition) and is in high shade – maybe that’s why it has never bloomed. It is not prone to serious diseases or insects, and its growth rate is medium. Dirr says it is simply a beautiful shrub for foliage and flowers, and that it needs room to expand. He prunes to expose the trunk and the contorted, twisted, spiraled stems. For this and other unusual trees, shrubs, perennials, etc, check out www.woodlanders.net (Aiken, SC).
INTERESTING TIDBITS
By Marty Finkel, Master Gardener, Granville County

Find out more information about two sugar-based insecticides being approved for use by organic farmers and gardeners, Sorbeshield 50 and Sucrashield. They are effective against numerous soft-bodied pests with minimal harm to beneficials. [Www.naturalforselcle.com](http://www.naturalforselcle.com) (from the Avant Gardener, April ‘09, Vol. 41, No. 6)

If you have honeybees, be sure to investigate the reputation of bee suppliers and check your bees when they arrive. Cornell university entomologists examined packages of honeybees from 4 suppliers in May ‘06, focusing on 4 major problems: parasitic mites (Varroa destructor), tracheal mites (Acarapis woodi), protozoan parasites (Nosema species), and the proportion of drone bees. Their research revealed no tracheal mites, but more than 50 parasitic mites per 1,000 bees in some packages. One package contained more than 20% useless drones. (From Plants & Gardens News, Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, Vol. 24, No. 1, Spring 2009)

A new series of dahlias with striking deep mahogany to black foliage is on the market, the Mystic (trademarked) series. They are compact at 18 to 36” and have a mounded form. Colors are soft apricot with a dark eye (‘Best Bet’ or Mystic spirit), pink-and-white striped (‘Kapow’ or Mystic Dreamer), scarlet-red (‘Scarlet Fern’ or Mystic Desire), and bright yellow with dark orange centers (‘Knockout’ or Mystic Illusion).

In spite of drought conditions, this series grew beautifully in the J.C. Raulston Arboretum 2007 trials. The dahlias should be grown in organically rich soil in full sun, or in containers. (From the “Carolina Gardens” column by Carla Burgess in the April 2009 issue of Carolina Country magazine.)

Recent research has shown that bluebird nest boxes should not be cleaned out in the fall. There is a blood-sucking fly that can kill baby bluebirds, and there is a parasite of this fly that needs the fall to complete its life cycle. The old nests should be removed in late winter to a sheltered spot nearby to keep this biological control available for the new season. (From The Avant Gardener, Vol. 41, No. 7, May 2009.)

Rose Thoughts for June
By Heidi Moore, Master Gardener, Warren County

What a spring this has been for the development of spectacular rose bushes and blooms. We have had more than sufficient rain and cooler than normal temperatures, allowing for larger and more abundant flowers. As a result of these cooler, damp conditions, it is very important to be disciplined about your weekly fungicide spraying to prevent the onset of black spot and powdery mildew.

Cutting your roses for arrangements and deadheading any spent blooms will encourage your plants to produce more growth and flowers throughout the growing season. An addition of liquid fertilizer during this productive time will be very beneficial to keeping your bushes strong and healthy. Don’t forget to keep them well hydrated.

FYI: Were you aware that history of the rose indicates its presence before man himself? Forty million years ago, a rose left its imprint on a slate deposit at the Florissant Fossil Beds in Colorado. Fossils of roses from Oregon and Montana date back 35 million years. There have been fossils found in Germany and the Balkans as well. Wild roses have been found as far north as Norway and Alaska, and as far south as Mexico and North Africa, but no wild roses have ever been found to grow below the equator. (From Ortho Books Complete Guide to Roses, Published by Meredith Books, Des Moines, Iowa, The Scotts Company, Copyright 2004)