The Garden Path
The path to an environmentally sound and beautiful landscape

December 2008

HOLIDAY HERBS
Edna Lovelace Gaston

The holidays are approaching rapidly! Of course we will use herbs while preparing delicious dinners and snacks – what’s dressing without parsley, thyme and sage? A special holiday potpourri can fill the home with fragrance. But uses don’t stop here – decorate with herbs!

Wreaths are very popular, the circle being a symbol of life. Let herbs send a message of greeting to friends and family as they enter your home. Start with a base of Santolina for protection. Add Rosemary for remembrance, Lavender for devotion, Parsley for joy, Basil for best wishes, Thyme for happiness, Marjoram for mirth, Burnet for a merry heart, I could go on and on but you get the idea. Lamb’s Ear can be used as a base for a living wreath then planted in the garden after the holidays.

How could we ever forget mistletoe! Technically it is an herb and originally had a pagan association so priests would not allow it in the churches of old England. But the Druids considered this plant so sacred that only the Arch Druid was allowed to cut it. A pure young maiden would catch the falling mistletoe on a piece of white linen. If it touched the ground some of its magical powers might be lost.

Another tradition regarding mistletoe comes from the Scandinavians. If enemies met under a tree growing this plant, they must lay down their arms until the next day. Is this how the custom of kissing under the mistletoe came to be?

Evergreen trees are usually in most homes. Frequently the tree is a Pine or Cedar. But Rosemary can be trained into a nice small plant. If you don’t want to spend the time training one yourself, many stores now offer them for sale. To use herbs as an ornament on the tree, gather a few short stems of your favorite combination. Cut an ‘x’ in the middle of a paper doily appropriate to the size of the herb bundle. Stick the stems through the cut. Tie the stems about the doily with a ribbon color that compliments your tree. This is especially nice on an artificial tree.

The mantle can be adorned with herbs instead of a garland. Either small pots festively decorated or cut stems placed across the mantle can be used. Herbs such as Lavender or Rosemary are a nice compliment to pine and cedar.

An Advent wreath can be constructed using small pieces of herbs can be inserted into an oasis ring. Thoroughly soak the oasis in water, place on a plate or mirror. First place the four candles equally spaced around the ring then insert small pieces of herbs to completely cover the base. If the stems are soft, use a small nail to make the hole for each stem. A few cedar berries placed among the greenery nicely compliments the traditional color of the Advent candles.

Other decorating ideas include herbs in a small festively decorated pot and used as placecards. Mints, with its wonderfully refreshing fragrance and representing virtue, is an excellent choice. Also

The Garden Path is a combined effort of the NC Cooperative Extension Vance & Warren County Centers and the Kerr Lake Master Gardeners.

Produced by: Paul McKenzie, Warren & Vance County Agricultural Extension Agent
Article Editors: Onda Marable & Danny Dixon, Master Gardeners

NC STATE UNIVERSITY Cooperative Extension
Helping People Put Knowledge to Work
Master Gardener
Lemon Balm (pleasant company of friends) conveys a warm message.

The possibilities are limitless. Just think about your ideas, pick herbs you like or have seasonal associations, add to your decorations and enjoy.

PEST OF THE MONTH: HEMLOCK WOOLY ADELGID

Information and photo from NCSU Ornamental and Turf Insect Note 119
Submitted by Cynthia Dickinson

EDITOR’S NOTE: This pest has not yet been reported in Vance or Warren Counties, but is a serious pest in numerous counties to our west.

The hemlock woolly adelgid is a small (1/32 inch), reddish-purple, aphid-like insect that covers itself with a white, fluffy secretion.

Eggs are brownish-orange, but darken as the embryo matures. The eggs are also hidden within the white, fluffy secretion. When the eggs hatch, flat, naked, reddish-brown adelgid crawlers move about actively. Once the crawlers settle, they become black with a white fringe around the edge and down the center of the back. Young adelgids live on twigs or at the bases of old needles. They soon secrete a white, fluffy "wool" that completely covers their body. The wingless nymphs resemble adults but are smaller. Infested branches become covered with circular, fluffy, white blobs.

The hemlock woolly adelgid overwinters as a female within the fluffy mass. Egg laying begins in February. Tiny crawlers hatch from the eggs and settle down to feed. Older nymphs secrete the fluffy, white "wool". Some nymphs develop into a winged form that leaves hemlock to lay eggs on an alternate host such as spruce. The remaining nymphs develop into wingless females that lay eggs in a fluffy mass on hemlock. Wind and animals disperse this insect. The second generation of adelgids on hemlock settle down as young nymphs in July to spend most of the summer as tiny black insects with a white fringe. In October or November, they molt, grow, and produce the fluffy white mass.

Control

The hemlock woolly adelgid is a difficult insect to control because the fluffy white secretion protects its eggs from pesticides. A good time to attempt to control it is in October when the second generation begins to develop. The insecticidal soaps and the horticultural oils seem to be very effective for adelgid control with minimal harm to natural predators and parasites of this pest.

INTERESTING TID-BITS
by Marty Finkel

Can ticks live through the normal wash, rinse, and spin cycle of your wash load? The answer is yes. In a test in which immature forms (nymphs) of lone star ticks and deer ticks were put in mesh bags and run through a washing cycle using hot water and various kinds of detergents, most of the lone star ticks survived. Most of the deer ticks survived when cold or warm water was used. Spending an hour in the dryer with high heat did them in, according to researcher John Carroll at the USDA’s Animal Parasitic Diseases Lab in Beltsville, MD.

Many expensive books on gardening and horticulture, including classics, are available online, and in most cases can be downloaded as PDF files through Google Book Search at books.google.com. Use the Advanced Book Search to look for specific titles or authors, and select “Full view only” in the search function to find books where the whole content is available.

In case you still have some green tomatoes and wish to ripen them, researchers in France have tested for optimum off-the-vine-tomato-ripening conditions. They used mature, still green, cherry tomatoes for the tests and found that storing in a well-lit place that doesn’t get very warm resulted in the highest concentration of seven carotenoids, including lycopene. These tomatoes were ripened at 70 degrees F in the presence of light and were tested six days after harvest when they were fully ripe.
However, for a sweeter taste, it was found that those ripened at 79 degrees F had higher levels of sugars and lower acids. This bit, and the two above, was gleaned from the newsletter of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, “Plants & Gardens News,” Volume 23, No. 3, Fall 2008 and Winter 2009.

One of the cultivars of the chaste tree, *Vitex agnus-castus*, ‘Shoal Creek’, received a 2009 Gold Medal Plant Award from the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. It grows in a vase shape and can reach 15’ in the South, has “best of the blues” flower spikes that are attractive to bees and butterflies, a long flowering period, and showy autumn seed heads – and is deer resistant. This can be a cutback shrub or allowed to reach mature height. Also, it was rated highest for floral beauty, along with ‘Montrose Purple’ (blue-purple flowers) in trials at Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, PA. ‘Silver Spire’, with pure white flower spikes up to 12” long, was also top-rated. A couple of different looks in *Vitex* can be found in *V. negundo heterophylla*, which has ferny foliage, and in *V. rotundifolia*, with small, grayish leaves and a dwarf habit, growing to about 3 to 4 feet in height with a 4 to 5’ width. This item was reported in the December 2008 issue of “The Avant Gardener” newsletter, Vol. 41, No. 2.

**PLANT OF THE MONTH** by Marty Finkel

Silver wintercreeper (*Euonymous fortunei* ‘Wolong Ghost’)

If you’re looking for a beautiful, evergreen groundcover, look no further than ‘Wolong Ghost,’ the cultivar name I like so much better than its common name of silver wintercreeper. In contrast to most *Euonymous* species’ roundish leaves, this one has long, narrow leaves spaced closely on the stems. The dark green leaves have a silvery white midrib, thus its cultivar name. It is mat forming, spreading several feet with a height of only 6 to a possible 12 inches tall. Also, it will grow vertically up walls, but will not attach because it has no suction “feet.” It is not fussy as to soil type – just plant in full sun to partial shade and water regularly until it becomes established (at least a year).

This plant is an introduction from Heronswood Nursery in Kingston, Washington, from the time when Dan Hinkley was the owner. It was collected from the Wolong Nature Preserve in China. There is a magnificent specimen at the JC Raulston Arboretum in Raleigh in the area of the Ruby McSwain building, planted alongside the steps to the left of the water cascade and pool.

**DECEMBER TO DO !**

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

· Most outside gardening activities should be finished by now.
· Still time to apply lime, if needed.
· Clean up under pecan trees.
· Most pruning can be put off until late winter or early spring when the weather is more comfortable.
· If you want to grow your own onion transplants, start seeds in December so that plants can be set out in February or early March. Use short-day or day neutral varieties for our area.
· Inventory your left over seeds. Do germination test if you are uncertain of their viability.
· Seed catalogs start coming in December. If you like to experiment, check catalogs for new or unusual varieties that cannot be found locally.

**Landscaping & Lawn Care**
*By Onda Marable, Master Gardener, Vance County*

· Think about adding plants with winter interest to your garden with red or yellow twig dogwoods, river birches, walking sticks, witch hazel, etc.
· Decorate for the season using plants from your yard, nandina, service berry, holly, laurels, magnolia leaves, magnolia seed pods, pine, pinecones, all make beautiful decorations for doors, mantels, windows, stairs, tables.
· When ordering from catalogs, remember the best plants often are sold out early. Reserve your selections quickly.
· Continue to clean up any summer leftovers. The more you do now, the less to do next spring.
· However, put off any heavy pruning until later in the winter.
ROSE TIPS FOR THE MONTH
By Heidi Moore, Master Gardener, Warren County

My hybrid tea roses have grown to almost 8 feet tall during the fall season, I have pruned or deadheaded since October. I have continued to enjoy some beautiful roses during this past month, and the cooler temperatures have allowed the buds to mature slowly producing some magnificent blooms. After a killing frost, which is below 27 degrees Fahrenheit, they are no longer attractive, as the buds have been burned severely with the cold and it is time to prepare my bushes for the winter months.

The first thing I do is strip any leaves that are yellowed or show any signs of fungus or disease. I then tie my bushes semi-tightly with jute twine and cut the bushes back to chest high. Some of my hybrid rose bushes never get to chest height, so I just tie them at their present height and do not cut at all. It is important to secure all branches so that any breakage due to ice, wind, or snow, will not damage the crown union. Once the bushes are tied and debris removed from around each bush, cover the crown union with wood mulch or composted grass and leaves. It is important that you be sure leaves have been composted to a fine consistency before applying to the base of your rose bushes. Heavy pile-up of leaves can harbor many insects and diseases that will winter over. After maintenance is completed, it is time to give your bushes a thorough spraying with a lime sulphur dormant spray which will help to kill any bacteria that may linger. It will be necessary to repeat the lime sulphur spray in late January or very early February.

Winter maintenance for rambler and climbing roses isn’t quite as necessary as the hybrids, but will make them look more pleasing throughout the winter months. If the bushes have become untamed, I will cut them back, but no further than chest high. Any severe pruning should be left until February. Your rambler and climbing roses should also be sprayed with the lime sulphur spray and mulched leaves can be added for winter protection.

When dealing with my Knock-out roses and any bush roses around the yard, it is not necessary to tie them, but I do trim them back to a uniform mound so there are no long branches that can be damaged by the weather... Any severe pruning should always be left until February. It is a good idea to put some composted lawn clippings around the base of these roses as well.

Be sure all your plants have had a thorough watering before you mulch them. If the ground is too dry, your plants will show stress as they do in a drought. The mulch will help hold the moisture in the soil and help keep ground temperatures more consistent throughout the ever-changing weather during December and January.