



The Garden Path

Winter, 2018

NC STATE

EXTENSION

Master Gardener | Vance-Warren

Checklist for December, January and February

By Mary Jane Bosworth

December

- ✓ Bare rooted trees may still be planted this month. Remember to water them throughout the winter during dry spells.
- ✓ Dig and transplant small shrubs.
- ✓ Now is the time to sow poppy seeds.
- ✓ Start onion seed indoors.
- ✓ Spend some time with catalogs creating a wish list for Christmas.
- ✓ Winter applications of lime are beneficial to spring gardens since lime takes a long time to react with the soil. Before doing this, make sure you take a soil sample and have it analyzed to see if lime is needed. If it is, then broadcast at the rate indicated on the report.
- ✓ Add your raked leaves to your compost bin for good compost in the spring.
- ✓ There is still time to plant spring blooming bulbs.
- ✓ Cut back Sedum, Mexican Bush Sage, Fall Asters and Garden mums within a few inches of the crown.
- ✓ Add colorful, cold hardy annuals to your garden for color this winter.
- ✓ Weed out the “weed” trees and shrubs in wooded areas while they are easily removed and before they compete for light and nutrients with desirable plants.

January

- ✓ Keep your garden well mulched to keep garden soil temperatures even and protect roots.
- ✓ Soak pea seeds overnight and plant directly into the garden. Start them under a row cover but once they are up, they no longer need covering.
- ✓ Check bulbs in storage such as Dahlia tubers and gladiolus. If any are rotted, throw them out.
- ✓ Spray roses this month with lime-sulfur to control insects and diseases.

February

- ✓ Mulch, water and protect your garden. The mulch helps keep the soil temperatures even.
- ✓ Damage done by hungry critters is not easy to prevent. There are many commercial repellents available. Read labels carefully before applying.
- ✓ Keep ahead of winter weeds by pulling them while they are still young.
- ✓ If you have a compost bin...shake it up (i.e. mix the materials periodically to speed up the process).
- ✓ Fertilize spring flowering bulbs when 1” of growth is seen.
- ✓ Ornamental grasses should be cut back before new growth starts.
- ✓ Plan for new garden beds, buy seeds and browse through catalogs to get ideas for the new gardening year.
- ✓ Anxious to get out in the garden, then this is the time to trim and prune. Most trees and ornamentals prefer to be shaped at this time of year. Remove diseased and dead limbs. Shape, keeping in mind that there will be growth in the spring. Do not shear...meaning cutting all branches to one length; but instead, cut branches at various lengths for a natural look.
- ✓ Remember, in your enthusiasm to trim, that you must not cut any spring flowering plants that bloom on last year's wood, such as azaleas, rhododendrons, forsythia, spirea, flowering quince, pieris and others.
- ✓ Clean up garden debris; add mulch to gardens.
- ✓ Plan for warmer months by spending time with gardening books and seed catalogs. Get new ideas and purchase something that will make you happy.

Ask your Master Gardener:

The first question for the Question and Answer column comes from Linda Sigmon:

"Since Hurricane Florence, there seems to be a proliferation of fire ants. What is causing this?"

Yes, you are seeing more fire ant mounds since Hurricane Florence dumped so much water on our region. The short answer is that the ants have been there all along, living in an underground nest, even if there was no distinctive mound that showed their presence. With the abundant rainfall, the soil became looser and the ants were able to make their nests larger by mounding up the soil on top.

Many colonies with a small number of ants are started in the spring and fall. As the colony adds more ants through reproduction, the size of the mound on top gets larger. The Red Imported Fire Ant (the fire ant species that is common in our area) is happiest when temperatures are between 70F and 95F. Therefore, they are feeding, growing larger colonies and establishing new colonies much of the year in our area.

New colonies are started by winged males and females by leaving the nest and engaging in aerial mating. This allows the females to be widely dispersed from their parent colony. Each female is going to try to start a colony after her eggs are fertilized and, as described, the small colony is likely to go unnoticed for some time.

I know you are interested in control so here are a few things to consider. Fire ants are difficult to eliminate because of numerous factors. A few are:

--Their spread underground and around the mound is considerably larger than the mound and, they may be well established before the mound betrays their presence.

--Anytime the temperatures are favorable, as previously described, potential queens spread out over a large area so re-infestation of areas that appeared ant-free is possible.

--Any product must be applied in such a way that it moves underground through the entire colony. This is normally accomplished by using baits (the ants spread the product through the nest) or by drenching the nest with an insecticide solution.



Typically, if you are vigilant, proactive and dedicated you can make life around your house less inviting to the fire ants and more enjoyable for you. The NC State Extension publication Red Imported Fire Ant in North Carolina, <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/red-imported-fire-ant-in-north-carolina>, although aimed at commercial sites has good information to help you get started understanding and managing this nuisance insect.

You may also find this article for the Alabama State Extension office to be helpful.

<https://articles.extension.org/pages/9766/fire-ant-habitat-and-food-sources>

By Juel Duke

What's bugging you?

This time of year, with the holidays, you seem to see invasions all over. The uncles, aunts and in-laws that came for Thanksgiving usually go home. There are other invaders, however, who hunker down and stay, and if you try to evict them, they sometimes put up a stink. No I'm not talking about your cousin Fred who likes your cooking better than his own. I'm talking about the BMSB. That's just his nickname. His full name is the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug. You'll have seen this guy hanging on your screens, scuttling around in your garage, hiding among the newspapers you have out there waiting to recycle, populating your attic, anywhere he can stay for the winter that's out of the elements.



If you can't remember this creature from when you were growing up, don't worry. It wasn't here. It was introduced from Asia to Pennsylvania in the 1990s and was first sighted in North Carolina in 2009. And let me tell you, it's not just an annoyance in the autumn when it's looking to overwinter. It's in the category of insect called Hemiptera and they all have piercing, sucking mouth parts.



While I agree that it's forward-thinking and environmentally conscious of them to have built-in straws for gaining nourishment, avoiding the use of plastic straws, I still don't like them landing on most fruits and vegetables in my garden, poking almost-ripe fruit and tomatoes with these piercing/sucking parts and ruining my crop!



Since they appear to have colonized and aren't going back to Asia, we need to learn to control them here. Like most nasty insects, they lay their eggs on leaves (see picture at lower right).

Mashing these little buggers whenever you see them in the garden is a good start. Pesticides that kill most other bugs will get them, (pyrethroid and neonicotinoid) but you have to be CAREFUL. Because they do, in fact, kill most other bugs, like the lacewings that eat the eggs, the bees that pollinate your vegetables etc, etc.



But to get back to the current problem, they are moving into your house in large numbers and you don't approve. I prefer the direct approach, myself. I usually go about with a small hand-held vacuum and scoop them up. Of course, their name should give you a warning that as soon as you have them in the vacuum, they will protest with an objectionable olfactory offense, i.e. they will stink, as advertised. You can try a facemask, but really, just put up with it and take the offensive odor outside, ok?

Empty the vacuum into something you can seal, throw it in the trash and you've solved that problem. Until the next invasion.

For more information, please visit the NC State website: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/brown-marmorated-stink-bug-1>

Photos by Steve Schoof, NC State University

All information was garnered from the NC State website article listed above; humor provided by Eileen Novak

“What good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter to give it sweetness.”

— John Steinbeck, Travels with Charley: In Search of America

Building a Rain Garden in Your Yard can be a Win-Win For Everyone

by Joy Smith

A rain garden can be a beautiful way to control runoff in your yard. We will learn more in a follow-up article about how to build a rain garden and what beautiful plants you can use, but let's get started now with talking about why a rain garden is a win-win project for everyone.

We all have water that runs off our roof, our driveway, and our other impermeable surfaces. Watching water run swiftly down your driveway can be fun to watch, unless it is running into your garage or where you need to walk. Runoff is also a nuisance if it is washing away the mulch you just bought and put down, washing away your expensive grass seed, or making gullies in your golf cart and walking paths. What if the water is sitting on your sidewalk and you have to get your feet wet to get in or out of your house? Well, maybe we can direct the water to our neighbors' yard. I have seen this done, but that is rather unkind and there are better ways. If we can stop the runoff from being a nuisance it is a definite win for us and a rain garden can do this.

A rain garden can be environmentally friendly. Rain gardens are built to encourage runoff to seep back into the ground, where it is naturally filtered, rather than running directly into storm drains or natural bodies of water like rivers, streams and lakes. Runoff can contain pollutants such as fertilizer and motor oil that it picks up on its journey off your roof, down your street or through your yard. So what can we do? You guessed it, build a rain gardens to help prevent runoff from pouring those pollutants directly into our drinking water and recreational areas.

You may have noticed that rain gardens are being built in many commercial developments like office building, schools and shopping centers. If you have not noticed, start looking around, they are there. This is happening because these projects often have very large impermeable surfaces that generate a lot of runoff. So once again, the rain gardens serve a purpose and they add interest to the landscape. I am always interested in them when I see them.

Finally, I just like doing things that make me feel like a good citizen. How about you? I bet you feel the same way. So building a rain garden in your yard can be a win for you and a win for our water. Did I peak your interest? If so, look for another installment, "How to Build a Rain Garden" in the next edition of The Garden Path.

If you can't wait for that and want to learn more now check out all this resource:
<https://forsyth.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/RGmanual2015.pdf>

“There are adventures of the spirit and one can
 travel in books and interest oneself in people and
 affairs. One need never be dull as long as one has
 friends to help, gardens to enjoy and books in the
 long winter evenings.”

— D. E. Stevenson, *Listening Valley*

Tyro's Corner - November 2018

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I have always thought it was a great waste to cut down my invasive Chinese privet and drag it off to the woods to disintegrate slowly over years. I wanted to be able to use the weed and make it work for me. So I have badgered my husband for years to get a chipper/shredder. He finally broke down this year.

Actually, it's more like I asked for years and finally this year I demanded. When left with no option, he ordered one directly from the manufacturer. Far be it from him just to go to a local big box store. This in itself was a learning experience. It was shipped to a place and we had to go and pick it up. Of course, it was shipped in the window between hurricanes and there was some delay due to the flooding of the freight yard, etc. Then it was loaded happily on our truck and we had to go home and figure out how to get it off.

Should have been easy, if we had not loaned the pallet forks for the tractor to a friend. As it is, we dismantled the packing crate, and offloaded it piece by piece. Makes me wish I hadn't quit weight-lifting. I also wish my husband didn't think that I have the same musculature as he does. Ah, well.

The next step in using my new garden implement was putting it together. I left that to my husband because he is so much better at it than I am. After that, I had to amass a pile of cuttings worthy of bringing the chipper to life. Now, it is my habit to name the mechanical tools that we have acquired. The tractor is Westley, because he is a "farm boy" (reference the movie The Princess Bride), my small tiller is Bucky, in recognition of his behavior while tilling our soil and hitting rock after rock after rock. So when I had amassed a good quantity of branches, I had to give thought to the name our new farm implement would have. But then I thought I would see how it behaved in action.

Let me tell you, that thing is a wild man. Paying strict attention to the branch diameter specifications, I sorted the privet into different piles. Then we brought it out, cranked it up and began creating mulch. That thing is a monster! My first handful of twigs went into its maw and came out the exit in a whoosh. I made the mistake of holding the next batch too tightly and felt it yank my arm almost out of its socket. Much care must be taken while using this machine. Then, of course, we came to the lengths of grapevine, wild rose, honeysuckle and smilax (a thorny vine) that I had dragged out of the canopy of a tree. Note to self: don't leave thorny vines in twenty-foot lengths as they tend to whip around while getting chopped. While not lethal, being whipped by vegetative barbed wire is NOT FUN.

After a while, my husband and I developed a good rhythm and made what might amount to a cubic yard of mulch. Eventually... In 3 years, maybe? In the meantime, it has proven its worth.

If you are all fired up now and are thinking that you need one, too, remember that I have 108 acres and I would estimate that I have at least a half an acre all told of invasive Chinese privet. So it might not be what YOU need. Oh, and if you are interested, I named the chipper Chewy.

[Extension Agent's note: As I'm certain Eileen and her husband did, stay safe by carefully reading and following the instructions that come with any piece of gardening equipment]

by Eileen Novak, Master Gardener and wounded garden warrior

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