

# The Gardener's Dirt

Johnston County Center

February 2016

*Marshall H. Warren*

Marshall H. Warren  
Extension Agent  
Commercial and  
Consumer Horticulture

## Feature Article

### Buying Fruit, Small Fruit Trees For Your Garden

Deborah M. Crandall, Master Gardener

Are you thinking of buying or planting fruit trees or berry bushes for this New Year? Your odds of success have a lot to do with which fruits you select to grow. Many garden centers in our area currently have fruit and berry plants for sale. Before you rush in to buy, take the time to plan ahead to ensure you spend your money wisely.

Many types of fruits and berries can be locally grown in home landscapes in eastern North Carolina. In ranking order from easiest to most challenging, these include: blackberries, figs, rabbiteye blueberries, Asian persimmon, muscadine grapes, hardy kiwifruit, strawberries, pears, plums, apples, peaches and nectarines. If you are looking for plants that will serve two purposes, try loquat, pineapple guava, or pomegranate, all of which are commonly grown as ornamentals but will occasionally produce fruit as well.



Picture: NC Peach Growers

Other fruits are less realistic. Cherries, bunch grapes, raspberries, and apricots are practically impossible to keep alive for more than a few years because of our hot summers and erratic springs. Citrus trees are not hardy enough to survive the winter outside but can be grown in large containers and brought indoors during winter months. Bananas will grow in our region as an ornamental plant, but our growing season is also short to allow fruit production.

Most fruit trees and berry plants do not take up a huge amount of space, but they do need to be planted in the right conditions. All fruits must be grown in well-drained soil, and will quickly die if planted in areas where water ponds for any length of time. Sun is also essential. Most fruit plants need at least eight hours of direct sunlight each day, though more is better. Besides, all fruits except except blueberries need to grow in soil that is not too acidic – for most a pH around 6.5 is ideal. If your pH is too low, you will need to work lime into the soil before planting. Have your pH tested before planting by bringing soil samples to your local Cooperative Extension office.

#### Inside This Issue

Feature Article.....	1
Be Creative, Grow Native.....	2
Good or Bad.....	3
NC Gardens.....	4
Quick Tip .....	5
Garden Tasks.....	6
Cool Connections....	8
Upcoming Events....	8

#### Contact Us

Johnston County  
Cooperative Extension  
2736 NC Hwy 210  
Smithfield, NC 27577  
(919) 989-5380 Phone  
(919) 934-2698 Fax  
johnston.ces.ncsu.edu

Distributed in furtherance of the acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914. North Carolina State University and North Carolina A&T State University commit themselves to positive action to secure equal opportunity regardless of race, color, creed, national origin, religion, sex, age, veteran status or disability. In addition, the two Universities welcome all persons without regard to sexual orientation. North Carolina State University, North Carolina A&T State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments cooperating.

---

---

Figs do not require a pollinator. Some fruits and berries require cross pollination, meaning you will have to plant more than one variety to get fruit. Fruits this applies to include rabbiteye blueberries, pears, plums, apples, and some muscadine varieties. For kiwifruit, you must plant both a male and female plant. Peaches, Asian persimmon, figs, and blackberries can produce fruit even if only one plant is grown. Before buying fruit plants, contact your local Cooperative Extension Office to find out which varieties are recommended for your area.

Before purchasing fruits and berries, first consider how much time you are willing to spend caring for them, if you know how to prune them, and if you are willing to spray pesticides. Correct training and pruning is essential for long term success with fruits. Different types of fruits have different pruning needs, but most need to be pruned at least once a year. Fruit trees generally require more specialized pruning than berry plants.



**Brown Turkey Fig**

Picture: NCSU Plant Clinic

Most fruit trees also require at least a few applications of pesticides each season to get a reliable harvest. Both organic and synthetic products are available for fruit tree pest control, but either way you have to be willing and able to correctly apply the right product at the right time. In our area, fruits that can most realistically be produced organically and with less maintenance are rabbiteye blueberries, figs, blackberries, Asian persimmon, pears, hardy kiwifruit, and muscadine grapes.

More on tree selection: <https://extension.umd.edu/growit/fruit-profiles/getting-started-tree-fruits>

Other related readings: <http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/producing-tree-fruit-for-home-use>  
<https://growingsmallfarms.ces.ncsu.edu/growingsmallfarms-fruits/>

## Be Creative, Grow Native

**Washington Hawthorn**

*Crataegus phaenopyrum*

Gerry Brown, Master Gardener

During a recent trip to Yellowstone National Park we had the pleasure of spending several days with a local naturalist. His knowledge of the local plant life as well as the wildlife was truly fascinating.

One plant that plays an important part in keeping wildlife fed in the area is the Washington Hawthorn.

---

---



The bright red berries that flush out in the fall provide food for many animals all across the US. In Yellowstone, there is even a Grizzly Bear that loves the berries so much that the Rangers nicknamed him “Hawthorn”.

This large thorny shrub or small tree likes full to partial sun and has a dense, upright compact form. The deciduous leaves have a red to orange fall color after a bright green summer. The late Spring flowers have a fetid odor and attract a variety of pollinators that turn the flowers into the red berries that are quite showy (if not eaten) in late Fall.

The Washington Hawthorn is fast growing when young. It can reach a height of 25-30 feet with a dense, compact, rounded crown. Plant it in moist soil in sun to partial shade. The Washington Hawthorn will not only add to your landscape but will also feed the local wildlife.



#### Sources:

Yellowstone National Park Rangers (first hand discussion this past year)

USDA.gov

Photos from <http://plants.ces.ncsu.edu>

## Good or Bad?

### Garden Sanitation

Deborah M. Crandall, Master Gardener

Garden sanitation is one thing that we can't say enough about as gardeners. It is called “**garden hygiene**”. It involves removal and destruction of sources of diseases, pest infested crops and weeds from the field. It's hard to try to do and even harder to actually do, but it's *really* important.

All you need to do is follow some simple rules.

**1)** Never touch a sick plant and then a healthy plant without *washing your hands* in between. This goes for pruners too.

**2)** Never prune a sick plant and then a healthy plant without *sterilizing your pruners with alcohol*. Keep a small container with you that you can quickly dip them in between plants.

---



---

**3) Never put diseased plant tissue into the compost.** Unless your compost pile gets really, really hot, you're just risking inoculating all your plants when you spread the compost. Bag diseased tissue and throw in the trash or burn it right away.

Gardeners have realized the limitations of fungicides and insecticides this growing season. Continuous rainfall has made it almost impossible to apply protective products for preventive control. In many cases, the products aren't on the plant for even 24 hours. As plants and produce succumb to what Mother Nature is dishing out, cleanup of infected and infested plant materials is very important.

Remove disease infected plant material from the garden and burn. Do not compost, because many disease organisms can survive in home compost piles. Pick up and dispose of fallen fruits as well. Control tall growing weeds and remove other debris around the garden to prevent overwintering sites for insects such as stem borers. Sanitation is one important way we can remove and reduce the chance for problems next year.

For more details:

10 Steps:

[https://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000498\\_Rep520.pdf](https://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000498_Rep520.pdf)

Sanitation: <https://www.ppd1.purdue.edu/PPDL/weekpics/11-19-07.html>



Picture: Purdue Extension

## Visiting Great NC Gardens

### J.C.Raulston Arboretum

Margy Pearl, Master Gardener

Even in the winter, our public gardens can be a wonderful source of inspiration and beauty. In February at the J.C. Raulston Arboretum, hellebores, witch hazel, flowering apricot trees, snow crocus, snowdrops and early daffodils are in enthusiastic bloom! The lush foliage of Alum, the varying textures, shapes and sizes of evergreens and conifers, the colors and interest of exfoliating bark on trees such as crepe myrtle can all be appreciated this time of year.

#### JC Raulston Arboretum

4415 Beryl Road,  
Raleigh, NC 27606-1446  
919-515-3132

Free and open to the public 365 days each year from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM (April through October) and 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM (November through March).



---

The excerpt below is from <https://gardening.ces.ncsu.edu/public-gardens/>

On that site, you will find information about hundreds of other arboretums, botanical and historical gardens, and natural areas throughout our State that welcome the public.

A nationally acclaimed 10.5 acre garden with one of the largest and most diverse collections of landscape plants adapted for landscape use in the Southeast. As part of the NC State University's Department of Horticultural Science, plants especially adapted to Piedmont North Carolina conditions are collected and evaluated in an effort to find superior plants for use in southern landscapes.

Plant collections include over 5,000 total taxa of annuals, perennials, bulbs, vines, ground covers, shrubs, and trees from over 50 different countries. Important plant collections include Acer (maple), Aesculus (buckeye), Buxus (boxwood), Cercis (redbud), Ilex (holly), Lindera (spicebush), Magnolia (magnolia), Quercus (oak), Styracaceae (silverbell family), Viburnum (viburnum), and Conifers (pines, arborvitae, cypress, etc).

Garden displays include: A. E. Finley Foundation Rooftop Terrace, Asian Valley, Butterfly Garden, Color Trials, Elm Circle, Finley-Nottingham Rose Garden, Geophyte Border, Japanese Garden, Klein-Pringle White Garden, Lath House, Mixed Border, Model Garden, Paradise Garden, Perennial Border, Scree Garden, Southall Memorial Garden, Winter Garden, Xeric Garden.

For tours and events each month, go to: <https://jcra.ncsu.edu>

On a sunny winter day, plan your next garden visit!

## Quick Tip: Cleaning & Sterilizing Pruners

Deborah M. Crandall, Master Gardener

After a heavy pruning job, your pruners should be soaked for at least 5 minutes (or as directed on the product label) in warm soapy water to wash off the grime, and rinsed with clean water or allowed to air dry before use. A longer soaking period may be needed for pruning tool surfaces that are not smooth. Finish with a light application of mineral oil before you put your pruners away.

Pruning saws, shears and other pruning tools can spread disease organisms from one plant to another or from one part of a plant to another part of the same plant if not properly disinfected. Sterilizing your tools is no guarantee against plant disease, but it can have a significant impact on disease incidence and severity.



Picture: Linda Ly

See links below for disinfection steps and available products.

More details at: [-http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu/Horticulture/documents/DisinfectingPruningTools.pdf](http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu/Horticulture/documents/DisinfectingPruningTools.pdf)

[-http://www.kcet.org/living/homegarden/inground-gardens/easy-care-for-your-garden-pruners.html](http://www.kcet.org/living/homegarden/inground-gardens/easy-care-for-your-garden-pruners.html)

---

---

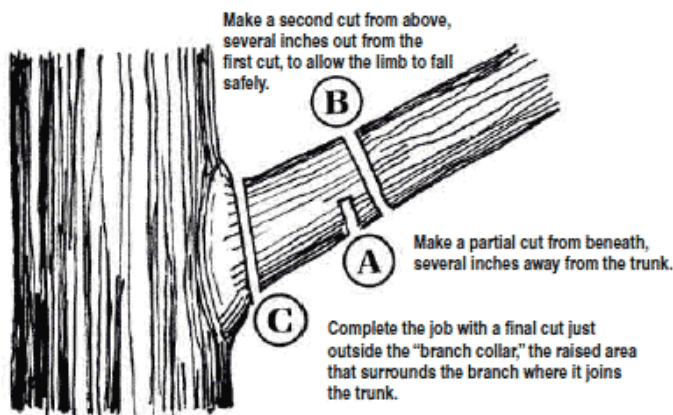
# FEBRUARY GARDEN TASKS

## Tree First Aid After a Storm

The ice storm we had this past week caused a lot of damage to trees. Although your trees may look mortally damaged after this past storm, trees have an amazing ability to recover from damage. With proper pruning and care, all but the most severely damaged have a good chance to regain their original health and beauty. Here are some things to do following a major storm:

**1. Assess the Damage** - Don't be too quick to declare a tree beyond hope. If damage is relatively slight, or if most of the tree's basic structure is still intact despite the loss of many smaller limbs, the tree stands a good chance of making it. On the other hand, if the trunk is split or if most of the tree's leafy crown is down, the tree may be beyond help.

**2. Get Professional Help** - If large limbs are hanging, if utility wires or structures are involved, or if high climbing is required, don't try to make repairs yourself. Secure the services of a certified arborist, a tree professional who can recommend needed repairs. They are generally listed in classified telephone directories under "Tree Service." Above all, don't hire just anybody who shows up on your doorstep with a chainsaw offering to remove or repair your trees. They are often interested in little more than removing your money.



Take safety precautions. Be on the alert for downed power lines and "widow makers," dangerous hanging branches ready to fall. And, unless you really know how to use one, leave chainsaw work to the professionals.

Remove broken branches that are still attached to the tree. Branches should be pruned at the point where they join larger ones, following the steps shown at left.

Don't top your trees! Never cut the main branches back to stubs. Ugly, weakly attached limbs will often grow back higher than the original branches and be more likely to break off in a future storm.

Some trees are weak wooded and more likely to be damaged in wind, snow and ice. Weak wooded trees commonly planted in North Carolina include: Leyland cypress, lacebark elm, Bradford pear, water oak, silver maple, green ash, willow and pecan. To minimize future damage, and avoid planting these trees near structures.

Info from Arborday.org

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/environment/trees-woodlands/storm-damage-to-landscape-trees/#damage>

<https://pender.ces.ncsu.edu/2014/02/dealing-with-ice-damaged-trees/>

---

---

## **Lawn Care**

- Cool season grasses should be fertilized mid-month. If a soil sample has not been taken, use a fertilizer of at least 30% slow release nitrogen at the rate of 1 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet.
- Crabgrass usually will start to germinate about the same time the Forsythia blooms. If you have had problems with crabgrass in the past, then you may want to apply crabgrass preventer (pre-emergence herbicide) when the Forsythia blooms.
- Pulling wild onion/wild garlic is the best way to get rid of these pesky bulbs, but make sure you get the bulb. If there are too many to pull, a product with 2,4-D works well for control. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's directions found on the label. Complete control may take two or more years. Apply 2,4-D at half the recommended rate on centipede lawns otherwise it will damage the grass.

## **Trees, Shrubs, and Ornamentals**

- Cut back dormant ornamental grasses to about 10 to 14 inches above the soil before new growth starts. Evergreen ornamental grasses (or grass-like ornamentals) such as Liriope and Mondo Grass should be cut short or mowed to remove last year's unsightly foliage. If the clumps have become too big for the area they can be divided and shared with friends or planted in other areas of the yard.
- Summer blooming shrubs bloom on new growth so they can be pruned hard in February to encourage new growth and more flowers. Examples include Abelia, Hibiscus, Hydrangea, Beautyberry, Butterfly bush, Althea, Rose of Sharon, and bush or Tea Roses.
- Spring blooming shrubs such as Azaleas, Rhododendrons, Forsythia, Spirea, Quince, Weigela, and Climbing Roses bloom on last years growth and should not be pruned until after they have flowered.
- Deciduous trees, especially those that bloom in the spring, should not be pruned this time of the year. Examples being Dogwoods, Red Buds, Maples and several others.
- Wait to prune the dead stems of hardy lantana until you begin to see new growth emerge in the Spring. The dead stems help keep it winter hardy.
- For many evergreens this is the best time of the year to prune if they haven't been pruned already.
- Summer blooming roses can be pruned this time of the year. Remember not to remove more than 1/3 of the growth. Remove old mulch and leaves from around plants as this removes many overwintering fungal spores. Put down fresh mulch.
- Bare root roses and trees can be planted this time of the year. Soak the roots overnight to rehydrate them before planting.
- Spring flowers such as Sweet Williams, Pansy, Viola, Calendula, Forget-Me-Nots, English Daisies, Poppy, Alyssum and Dianthus can be planted now. Don't forget to deadhead pansies and fertilize toward the end of the month.

## **Edibles**

- Asparagus crowns can be planted now through March.
- Transplant cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower out into the garden.
- Strawberry plants can be planted now for spring fruits.
- Beets, carrots, peas, lettuce, mustard, radish, spinach, irish potatoes, and turnips can be sown outside.
- Starting seeds indoors is easy and economical. Sometimes it is the only way to get the color or variety of the plants you want to grow. It is not necessary to use "grow lights", ordinary florescent tubes will usually be enough. For more information you can read the pamphlet "Starting Plants from Seeds", it is on the web at <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8703.html>
- February and March are good months to prune fruit trees.
- It is time to start a spray program for peach trees to control the many diseases and insects that attack peaches.

## **Insects**

- Control overwintering insects such as scale and their eggs by hand picking or using a dormant oil spray (also know as horticultural oil ). Be sure to check for scales before spraying. Follow the manufacturer's
-



---

directions when applying any pesticide. Do not apply dormant oils to broadleaf evergreens when freezing temperatures are expected.

- Cool-weather mites are not visible to the naked eye. Junipers and other needled evergreens are a favorite hang out of these mites. If you had some of these plants that were an unsightly brown last year, check them with a hand held magnifying glass to see if cool season mites are to blame. Horticultural oil or other registered insecticides can improve their situation and appearance.

## COOL CONNECTIONS

### **NC Extension Gardener Manual**

<http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook>

### **Past Issues of Gardeners Dirt**

<https://www.ces.ncsu.edu/newGDsite/>

### **NCSU Publication Links**

<https://www.ces.ncsu.edu/lawn-and-garden-publications/>

### **NC Extension Gardening Portal**

<https://gardening.ces.ncsu.edu/>

### **NC Extension Plant Database**

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/>

### **Going Native (Selecting and Planting Native Plants)**

<https://ncsu.edu/goingnative/>

### **NCSU Pruning Trees and Shrubs**

<http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/how-to-prune-specific-plants>



Brenda Clayton  
Master Gardener of the Year

## Upcoming Events

### **Kerr Lake Extension Master Gardeners 2016 Symposium**

Backyard Gardening: "Landscaping and Beyond - Big Ideas for Smaller Gardens"

Great speakers! Public is welcome! Sign up before February 15 for best fee.

For more info go to [kerrlakemg@gmail.com](mailto:kerrlakemg@gmail.com)

NEWSLETTER EDITED BY: Brenda Clayton

\*\*\* If you would like to receive this newsletter monthly via email, send an email to [angie\\_faison@ncsu.edu](mailto:angie_faison@ncsu.edu) asking to be added to "The Gardener's Dirt" email list.

---