

# IN THE GARDEN

HELPING GARDENERS PUT KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

January 2016



## Do you want to become a Master Gardener Volunteer?

*Lisa Rayburn*

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Extension Agent,  
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Master Gardener Volunteer, Rebecca Ingram, answers clients' questions in the Plant Clinic

## Onslow County Master Gardener Volunteer Class Starts March 7, 2016

The Onslow County Center of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension is offering a Master Gardener Volunteer class starting March 7, 2016. The Master Gardener Volunteer Program is a joint endeavor of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service and volunteers who wish to learn how to be better gardeners and help other gardeners by sharing their knowledge. The program is designed to recruit and train volunteers to help meet the educational needs of the citizens of Onslow County.

Class participants learn about a wide variety of gardening subjects including vegetables, fruits, lawn grasses, shrubs, flowers and trees. The training focuses on developing diagnostic skills for insects and diseases of plants. Classes are also given on landscaping for water quality, soils, composting, propagation, wildlife control and much, much more!

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Master Gardener Volunteer, Teri Welch, harvests lettuce at Tarawa Terrace Community Garden

Master Gardeners receive 40 hours of training and after graduation they provide 40 hours of volunteer work in the community. Master Gardeners are involved in a range of community projects including: answering homeowner inquiries at the Extension office and Farmers' Market, mailing information bulletins to homeowners, conducting plant clinics, working with school children on special horticultural projects, talking to garden clubs, working on community beautification projects and developing the new Discovery Gardens of Onslow.

The 2016 Master Gardener course will begin March 7 and run through May 11. Classes normally will be taught Monday and Wednesday mornings from 9:00 am until noon. There are several field trips as well. Cost for the course is \$100, which includes a comprehensive Master Gardener Manual. Please make checks payable to Onslow County CES. Checks must be mailed in no later than February 19, 2016.

We are currently taking applications for the 2016 course. If you are interested, please call the North Carolina Cooperative Extension - Onslow County Center at (910) 455-5873, and request an application. Space in the class is limited

## GMO-Free Seeds



The seed catalogs have started showing up in the mail and its time to plan the spring garden. If you are a gardener who strives to be socially responsible, you may be wondering where you can safely purchase seeds that are GMO-free. In fact, many small seed companies have signed a "safe seed pledge" stating that they do not knowingly buy, sell or trade genetically modified (GM) plants. This safe seed pledge raises a lot of questions, and implies that other seeds out there on the market are genetically modified but is this true?

First, lets talk a little bit about genetic modification or genetic engineering. Every food crop that we grow and eat has been modified from its original wild form. Humans have been saving seed and selecting for crop traits for thousands of years through plant breeding. Many of our crops bear little or no resemblance to their wild ancestors. The terms "genetically modified" (GM), "genetically modified organism" (GMO), genetically engineered or transgenic are typically applied to crops where the DNA has been modified through a specific process where several genes are added or removed. The genes that are added may be from a completely unrelated

organism – this is a process that would be difficult if not impossible to achieve through regular plant breeding. Crops may be modified for a variety of reasons. Examples include: to make them more resistant to insects or diseases, more drought tolerant, resistant to certain herbicides, or improve storage quality. GM-crops must be tested to ensure that they are safe to eat and nutritionally similar to the non-GM version of that crop before they are allowed on the market. We aren't going to get in to all the reasons that crops are genetically modified or debate whether or not crops should be genetically modified, but rather discuss when or if GMOs can make it in to your vegetable garden.

So where can you find genetically modified organisms? Well they are all over the grocery store, in your clothes and in the gasoline that you put in your car. In the United States, there are nine crops commercially available from GM-seed: corn, soybeans, cotton, alfalfa, sugar beets, canola, papaya, squash and potato. That's it. A GM-apple has been approved and is coming to the market soon but isn't available yet. A GM-tomato, the Flavr Savr tomato, was approved but was only marketed for three years and is no longer on the market. If you buy processed foods containing corn, sugar or soy, chances are good that you are buying GM-products unless the food is specifically labelled as organic or GMO-free. GM-corn is used in the production of ethanol, commonly added to gasoline. GM-cotton can be found in clothing and other fiber-products. GM-crops are frequently used in animal feed for the production of beef, pork, and chicken.

However, you are not likely to find GMOs in your home vegetable. For

gardeners, there is no one selling genetically engineered seeds to home gardeners. Seed companies put a lot of money and effort in to producing their GM crops. When GM seeds are sold to commercial farmers, farmers are required to sign a contract that protects the company's investment in their patented plant technology. These companies do not sell GM-crops to the home garden market or to garden centers. Even Monsanto's subsidiary, Seminis, does not sell GM-seeds to the home garden market. I guess you might be able to pass yourself off as a farmer and access GM seeds that way but that would take some effort and ingenuity on your part. This means that the "safe seed pledge" is fairly meaningless. In fact, it is a marketing strategy designed to take advantage of consumers who do not know that GM-seeds are not freely available to the home gardener.



So, when you are looking for garden seeds this spring, you can rest assured that whether you choose "organic", "heirloom", or hybrid seeds, there are no GM-seeds in your cart. If you are particularly concerned, remember that there are only nine commercially available GM-crops from seed - corn, soybeans, cotton, alfalfa, sugar beets, canola, papaya, squash and potato. So don't get suckered in to paying extra for GM-free wheat seed or cucumber seeds – they are all non-GM.

You certainly will find GM crops in the grocery store, gas station or clothing store, but you aren't likely to find them in your vegetable garden.



## Recognizing the Master Gardener Volunteers



I would like to take a moment to recognize the Master Gardener Volunteers who work so hard to help me answer the gardening questions that we receive in Onslow County. These volunteers support a variety of projects including manning the Plant Clinic and Ask-A-Master Gardener booths at community events, providing educational classes to the public, and working to plant and grow the Discovery Gardens of Onslow.

In 2015, the Onslow County Master Gardener Volunteers provided over 4,815 hours of service to our community. This brings the program to a lifetime total of 46,340 hours donated to Onslow County over the last twenty years. This group contains many wonderful volunteers and each year I struggle to select one outstanding member to recognize as Master Gardener Volunteer of the Year. This year, I want to recognize Teri Welch.

Teri has been an active Master Gardener Volunteer since she graduated from the training class in 2013. Teri has been active in many roles including the Plant Clinic and as a board member. She has played a stand out role as chair for our Public Events Committee. She

coordinates our public events, ensures that Master Gardener Volunteers are signed up to work their shifts, and makes sure that they have everything they need to be successful. Her outgoing nature and people-skills make her a real asset at public events, she can talk to anyone, anywhere! Teri shows up at each meeting with a smile and a tray of her delightful deviled eggs. Teri has volunteered over 319 hours this year alone and over 759 hours in her three years with the program. Thank you, Teri!

A major project of the Onslow County Master Gardener Volunteers is the Discovery Garden. At completion, this 4-acre teaching garden will serve as an education and outreach tool for the Master Gardener Volunteers as well as a beautiful space for the community to come together and enjoy the natural world. We have a great group of volunteers that show up every week to weed, water, mulch, plant, haul, chop, fix and dig. We have made a lot of progress this year and expect to see things move along quickly in 2016 but we couldn't do what we do without our Workday Wednesday Crew! For this reason, I would also like to recognize Gary Gerard as Discovery Garden Volunteer of the Year.

Gary has been an active Master Gardener Volunteer since he graduated from the training class in 2012. Gary is an anchor of the Discovery Garden Workday crew. He shows up religiously and doesn't stop working. I struggle to stay out ahead of him and other volunteers struggle to keep up with him! In addition to his efforts during workdays, he keeps all of our small engine equipment maintained, repaired and ready to go. He can build anything we need out of wood whether it's a raised bed (he prepared all of the materials for the

raised bed garden) or a birdhouse. In addition to his work in the gardens, Gary takes an active role in the Plant Clinic, answering client questions each Friday afternoon. This year, he broke in to teaching as well. He taught a class on Equipment Maintenance and Repair that students still rave about!

If you see Teri and Gary in the Plant Clinic, public events, the Discovery Gardens or at classes this year, please thank them for their hard work and efforts on behalf of Onslow County's gardeners and the Discovery Gardens. Thank you, Teri and Gary!

### **The Problem with This Beautiful, Warm Weather**



My pear trees are blooming. These blossoms will not be productive nor will they be available to bear fruit in the spring.

The weather this fall has been gorgeous - warm and sunny. As delightful as the weather has been, it may pose some problems in the garden this winter. Normally, at this point in the season, cooler temperatures and several frosts would have pushed many of our plants in to dormancy. Due to unusually warm weather and just two periods of light frost, many of our plants are not hardened off for

winter. If temperatures stay warm and then drop precipitously in January or February, we could experience a lot of winter damage on plants. Particularly those that are marginally hardy in our area. Ongoing warm weather could result in bud loss on many of our fruit crops including strawberries, peaches, and pears.

What can you do? There is not a whole lot that you can do to control Mother Nature but do resist the urge to get out in the garden and prune woody plants. Pruning helps stimulate plant growth and pruning at this point could result in additional winter damage. If possible, wait until late February or March to prune woody plants including grape vines.

### **Find the Gardening Information on the Radio**



I host the Garden Journal on Public Radio East. The Garden Journal airs Friday at noon on all PRE Stations and Saturday at noon on

News and Ideas. In Onslow County, that is 91.5 FM and 89.3 FM on Fridays and 91.5 FM Saturdays. Tune in and join me. Is there a topic that you would like me to address on the show? If so, email me at [lisa\\_rayburn@ncsu.edu](mailto:lisa_rayburn@ncsu.edu) and you may hear your answer on the air.

## Upcoming Events

### **Onslow County Master Gardener Volunteer Association Meeting**

January 14, 9 am  
Onslow County Extension Office

### **Onslow County Beekeepers Association Meeting**

January 12, 7 pm  
Onslow County Extension Office

### **Onslow County Master Gardener Volunteer Training Class**

March 7 – May 11, 9 am – 12  
Onslow County Extension Office  
Call 910.455.5873 or stop by to  
request an application.  
Applications and payment must be  
received by February 19.  
Cost of class \$100.

## CONTACT US

If you have questions about lawn,  
landscape or garden problems,  
contact your local Cooperative  
Extension office. In Onslow County  
call 455-5873, Mon – Fri. 8 am – 5  
pm, or visit us online anytime at  
<http://onslow.ces.ncsu.edu>. While  
you are there, you can post your  
questions to be answered by email  
using the “Ask an Expert” widget (in  
the upper left hand corner).

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