

THE GARDEN PATH , FEBRUARY 2013

A publication of Kerr Lake Extension Master Gardeners

PLANT OF THE MONTH FOR FEBRUARY

By Marty Finkel,
Kerr Lake Extension Master Gardener

‘Amethyst’ witch hazel

We are so lucky to be living in North Carolina! February is bursting with flowering trees, shrubs, perennials, and bulbs! There are so many camellias, witch hazels, magnolias, Japanese flowering apricots, mahonias, pieris, in bloom that it fairly makes one dizzy with delight. Add to those the Japanese quince, Cornelian cherry, Daphne, Edgeworthia, hellebores, irises, winter honeysuckle, and many others and it is clear that Spring has arrived, no matter what the weatherman says.

Almost everyone knows witch hazels in their late-winter/early-spring glorious colors of pale to deep yellow, yellow-orange, the orange to rust spectrum, and even what the books call “red”. However, the amethyst hue of this month’s choice is a break-through in the color barrier. The photo on the left is an example of the yellow-to-orange-to rust typical color. You can see how different ‘Amethyst’ is.



There are many cultivars in the *Hammamelis mollis* group, the Chinese witchhazel, as well as in the *H. xintermedia* group. There is another species, *H. japonica*, Japanese witchhazel, which was used with *H. mollis* to create *H. x intermedia* and the latter species has intermediate characteristics. Nearly all these plants are easy to grow and are in the 8’ to 15’ height range,



depending on the species and cultivar, with some of the hybrids getting to 20’. Most have an open, spreading shape. They enjoy a moist, acid, well-drained organic soil in full sun or partial shade. There are no serious disease or insect problems, and most of them are fragrant. Left photo: M. Finkel; Right: JCRA

GARDEN TO DO – FEBRUARY

By Carl Shafer,
Kerr Lake Extension Master Gardener

During warm spells, dormant sprays can be applied to fruit trees and vines this month. For specific recommendations, check the NC Chemical Manual, (ipm.ncsu.edu/agchem/agchem.html), and always follow label directions. For additional information see: Disease and Insect Management in the Home Orchard, (www.cals.ncsu.edu/plantpath/extension/clinic/fact_sheets/index.php?do=disease&id=7). For the dormant spray only, dormant oil and lime-sulfur may be combined. When leaves are present this combination will burn the leaves.

Finish pruning fruits if needed before spraying. Peach trees and grape vines normally need the most pruning. Check at the Extension office for pruning bulletins. See *Training & Pruning Fruit Trees*, AG-29 (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/ag29.html). Also see *Producing Tree Fruit for Home Use*, AG-028 (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/ag28.html) and *Grapes & Berries for the Garden*, (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/agpubs/grapesberries.pdf).

Get a copy of the Extension Services *Home Vegetable Gardening* AG-06, (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/pdf/ag-06.pdf) to use to plan your garden this year. Also see *Central North Carolina Planting Calendar* for

Annual Vegetables, Fruits, and Herbs

(http://cals.ncsu.edu/hort_sci/extension/documents/AG-756.pdf). Notice that many cool-season, direct-seeded, vegetables can be planted starting in February, some even in January. These include: garden and edible-pod peas, beets, carrots, lettuce, onions (seeds, sets, and plants), radishes, Irish potatoes, and spinach. Be careful to not work the soil when it is too wet. For planning purposes, note that the average last frost date (32°F) for the Henderson area is April 21 and average last 28°F date is April 6.

Start seeds early this month of broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower for transplanting in mid to late March. Start seeds of eggplant, pepper, and tomato later this month for transplanting in late April and early May. See *Growing Vegetable Transplants for the Home Garden*, HIL 8104, (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/pdf/hil-8104.pdf). Buying a bag or two of seed starting mix is preferable to trying to make your own mix. Buying a “Seed starting heat mat” to provide bottom heat will result in quicker and more complete germination. To provide the bright light that is needed to grow stocky transplants a two-tube fluorescent fixture works well. Use one “cool” and one “warm” bulb. A simple timer allows you to set the time for the light you want – 16 hours is usually recommended. I found the following extension plans for adjustable light stands: (www.gardening.cornell.edu/factsheets/growlite/index.html) and (<http://umaine.edu/publications/2751e/>). I find that I need to start eggplants and peppers about two weeks before the tomatoes. If you are buying transplants, check local sources but note you may need to check farmers’ markets in the Raleigh or Durham area for organic and/or uncommon open-pollinated varieties.

For a listing of NCSU Extension Publications for Lawn and Garden, see www.ces.ncsu.edu/Publications/lawngarden.php

For a source of objective, research based information, see: eXtension (www.extension.org). Note that this is a product of the Cooperative Extension System and 75

land-grant universities in the U.S. Care must be used because some information will be for regions much different than North Carolina.

CHECKLIST FOR FEBRUARY

By Mary Jane Bosworth,
Kerr Lake Extension Master Gardener

A garden is a friend you can visit anytime.
Anonymous

February has some warm days when it is good to get out in the garden.

Late January, early February is the ideal time for the pruning and shaping of most trees and ornamental shrubs. For specifics on pruning, go to:

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/agpubs/ag-071.pdf>

In general:

- ✓ Remove diseased and dead wood from any plant.
- ✓ Spring flowering shrubs bloom on last year’s growth and should not be pruned until after they flower. These include azaleas, rhododendrons, forsythia, spirea, flowering quince, pieris, weigela, abelia, oakleaf and peegee hydrangeas, beautyberry and clethra.
- ✓ Overgrown plants like Burford holly, cleyera, pittosporum and ligustrum can be cut back to 15-24” from the ground.
- ✓ Conifers such as pine, spruce, fir, yew and arborvitae will not withstand heavy pruning. If a branch is cut back past the foliage area, the rest of the branch will not re-foliate. The best time to prune conifers is just after new growth is completed.
- ✓ Ornamental grasses should be cut back before new growth emerges. Mow Liriope to remove last year’s foliage.
- ✓ Fescue lawns should be fertilized around Valentines Day.
- ✓ Apply a dormant oil spray to ornamentals for control of over-wintering insects and eggs.

- ✓ Transplanting of deciduous trees and shrubs that are still dormant can be done this month.
- ✓ Fertilize shrubs and evergreens in mid to late February. Use a slow-release fertilizer.
- ✓ It's time to start slow growing plants from seed indoors or in a greenhouse. This includes: lobelia, ageratum, verbena, petunia and vinca.

INTERESTING TID-BITS FOR FEBRUARY

By Marty Finkel,

Kerr Lake Extension Master Gardener

As reported in an earlier issue of The Garden Path, there was a very interesting article in the October 1, 2012 industry publication "Greenhouse Grower" by Allan Armitage titled "The Garden of the Future". Dr. Armitage describes himself as being firmly entrenched in the commercial side and rooted in the gardening side of the green industry and foresees tomorrow's gardens on the deck, on the porch, or the veranda, or the balcony because young people are too busy and distracted to garden and most find annual and perennial gardens too much work. While Armitage's field is herbaceous plants, woodies and fruits seem to be joining the trend. There are several dwarf blueberry varieties available that would make a fine addition to a patio garden.

Heat tolerant blueberry varieties have been and are currently coming from research programs at the University of Georgia and the University of Florida. These are classified as southern highbush blueberries and are hybrids between the northern highbush (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) and various southern species such as rabbiteye (*V. ashei*). The ones mentioned in the May/June 2012 issue of "Horticulture" magazine in an article titled "Blue Angels" by Jenny Andrews tend to be in the 3'-4' and 4'-5' tall and wide range.

The Center for Environmental Farming Systems at NCSU offers different and varied workshops in Raleigh, Durham, and possibly elsewhere. These are open to the public and you can ask to

be on their mailing list for workshop announcements by entering CEFS, NCSU, Raleigh, NC on your search engine. They offered a workshop on tomato grafting in January, but it filled up fast. If you're interested in that and other topics, check them out. There may be fees involved in participating in the workshops.

Among the many worthy 2013 All-America Selections (all-america-selections.org) award winners are 'Jams 'N Jellies Blackberry' vinca (*Catharanthus roseus*) and 'Cheyenne Spirit' coneflowers. The vinca can appear almost black and should be a great container or bedding plant. The coneflowers are a mix of purple, pink, red and orange tones with lighter yellows, creams, and whites included. Some seed companies offer 'Cheyenne Spirit' seeds – a less expensive way to add them to perennial borders, mass in landscapes, plant in butterfly gardens and use as cut flowers. Full sun.

HERB OF THE MONTH, FEBRUARY

By Edna Lovelace Gaston,

Kerr Lake Extension Master Gardener

Winter may still be here but spring is just around the corner. Now is the time to begin planning our gardens. Here's another in my series of thematic gardens. This one features Yellow / Lemon Scented Plants.

To get you in the yellow/ lemon mood don't forget about pansies, snapdragons, Witch Hazel and yellow crocus to be followed by yellow-colored bulbs such as daffodils. A long-time favorite is buttercups. For the summer plant yellow marigolds. Now we can move on to herbs.

Some of the tender herbs include annuals such as Lemon basil (*Ocimum basilicum* 'Citriodorum') and Lemon bergamot (*Monarda citriodora*). I have successfully grown both in this area. Some of my favorite tender perennials include Lemon verbena (*Aloysia triphylla*), Lemon-scented geraniums (*Palargonium crispum*) and Lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*). All three are being wintered over in my greenhouse.

Some years they get to spend the winter in the house, residing near an eastern exposure window. Then there are the perennials – prepare an area, plant, keep watered during dry times, maintain and enjoy for years. Some suggestions are the several available varieties of Lemon thymes (*Thymus*), wonderful plants for the front of a bed or draping over the edge of a container and Lemon catnip (*Nepeta cataria* 'Citriodora'), my cats love this one. Two other plants are Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*) and Lemon mint (*Mentha x piperita* 'Citrata') but both are best grown in containers. As mentioned in other articles, these plants will be EVERYWHERE if roots make contact with garden soil.

Some other yellow-colored plants to include in the garden are Lemon Lily (*Lilium parryi*), Lemon daylily (*Hemerocallis lilio-asphodelus*). There is also a gorgeous yellow Foxglove which is always a great addition to any garden. Monochromatic gardens can be beautiful. Or overkill if done in excess. But going opposite yellow on the color wheel (violet) will make both colors pop. A future article will deal with some of my favorite violet / purple flowers.

These plants are by no means all lemon-scented or plants with yellow flowers. Some variegated foliage has a yellow tint. Soon we can visit plant centers and nurseries for ideas. Remember right plant, right place! Don't combine plants just because you like them together if they don't have the same light, soil or moisture requirements. They won't be happy and thrive so you won't be pleased. A little advance time and planning pays off in the long run.

Research then get ready for a visual and fragrance feast,

Ladybug

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Pictures courtesy of M. Finkel, JC Raulston Arboretum