

IN THE GARDEN NOW

HELPING GARDENERS PUT KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

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Preserving Herbs for Winter



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One of the joys of the summer vegetable garden is fresh herbs. Whether it's wonderful combinations of dill and fresh cucumbers, or basil leaves tucked between slices of sun-ripened tomatoes, herbs really add to a meal. Unfortunately, we are nearing the first frost of the season. And while this means an end to the summer bounty, there is no reason that you can't enjoy the taste of fresh herbs through the winter.

Some of my favorite herbs grow best in the cooler temperatures of fall including dill, cilantro and parsley. These herbs will grow better now than they did during the heat of summer. While it is a little late to sow seeds, you can still set out transplants that will continue growing past the first frost and well into the New Year. You can harvest a couple of leaves at a time for continuous production or make several plantings, two to three weeks apart for a heavier harvest.

Basil, which is very sensitive to cold temperatures, is not going to survive past the first frost unless you bring it inside to a greenhouse or glassed in porch. If you don't have the space or inclination to overwinter your basil indoors, harvest all that is left just before the first frost is anticipated in your area. I prefer to freeze basil rather than drying it. Freezing preserves basil's fresh summer flavor better than drying. There are several ways to freeze basil depending on how you will ultimately use the product.

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Basil leaves are easy to freeze. Simply wash and dry whole leaves, stack them in layers and place them in a heavy-duty plastic freezer bag. Squeeze as much air out of the bag as you can and place it flat in the freezer. When you are ready to use your basil, just break the desired size piece off and crumble or chop it in to your dish. Freezing basil maintains that bright flavor but the texture will not be as appealing, it will be soft when it thaws, so make sure you use it in cooked dishes where the texture change won't be noticeable.

My favorite way to use basil and to store it is as pesto. Pesto is very easy to make, especially if you have a food processor. You can find many pesto recipes online but here is the one that I use, and it is an easy one to start with.



Pesto:

1-2 gloves garlic

¼ cup nuts (pine nuts or walnuts)

2 cups packed fresh basil leaves

2/3 cup high quality olive oil

½ cup parmesan cheese

Pulse the garlic and nuts in the food processor until they are finely chopped. (Pine nuts are traditional but they are rather expensive so I use walnuts instead.) Then add the basil and pulse gently until it too is finely chopped. Next pour in 2/3 cup high quality olive oil and pulse gently to combine. Then add ½ cup parmesan cheese, salt and pepper to taste and stir gently to combine. These are ratios to get you started and you can adjust them to your taste. You can also substitute other herbs or seasonings. Sometimes I use pecans instead of pine nuts or walnuts if that is what I have on hand.

You can freeze pesto in batches or smaller amounts depending on how much you use at a time. An 8-ounce freezer container is a great size for freezing a batch of pesto. That is the right amount of pesto for a one pound batch of pasta. You can also like using it on meats, vegetables or spread on toasted bread. If you prefer to use pesto in smaller quantities, freeze it in ice cube trays. Once the cubes are fully frozen, pop them out and store them in a heavy-duty freezer bag. That way you can pull out just what you need.

When you thaw pesto, let it defrost in the refrigerator or at room temperature. If you try to speed the process up, you may melt the cheese and disrupt the texture of the pesto.

Some herbs don't need to be preserved at all. You can leave perennial herbs in the garden and harvest them as needed. Rosemary, oregano and thyme are all perennials in our climate meaning that they will grow outside, just fine, year round whether in a container or in the ground. If you have them in a container, just watch and if we are anticipating a really heavy freeze, bring the containers into the garage or another protected location or insulate the containers to prevent the root ball from freezing. Otherwise, just snip these herbs as you need them through the winter and don't feel like you have to bring the plants inside or preserve them.

Herbs like ginger and lemongrass, which are tropical in origin, should be brought into the greenhouse or a sunny window if you want to keep them going for next season.

With a little bit of planning, you should be well set for flavorful, tasty, healthful meals throughout the winter months.

You can learn more about growing herbs here:

<http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/growing-herbs-for-the-home-gardener.pdf>

You can learn more about preserving herbs here:

<http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/harvesting-and-preserving-herbs-for-the-home-gardener/>



Tips and Tasks

November is a great time to plant bulbs for spring flowers. It is also a good time to divide established bulb plantings if they need it. Bulbs that will perform year after year in Onslow

County include: daffodils, star flower (*Ipheion uniflorum*), blue bottles (*Muscari neglectum*), Spanish bluebells (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*), summer snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum*) and lilies (both Asiatic and Oriental). Tulips and hyacinths tend to melt out after several seasons due to our warm, moist summers.

Mow the lawn one last time. You can mulch leaves with your lawn mower and spread a light layer over the yard to add organic matter to the soil. If you have a lot of leaves, rake them up and add them to the compost pile.

If you are planning on making new garden beds, or expanding current ones, why not do it now and save yourself some work during the hectic spring gardening season? You can make a lasagna bed or cover an area of grass with thick layers of newspapers and mulch. In the spring you will have an area ready to amend and plant -- without having to remove sod! Realize that this technique is not effective at controlling very aggressive weeds such as bermudagrass or Florida betony.

Submit soil samples to NCDA prior to November 25th to avoid the \$4 per sample peak season fee. The peak season soil sample fee will be in effect until April 1st.

If you haven't already moved your houseplants back indoors, do so now. Inspect plants, including the root ball, for insects before bringing them inside. Aphids, scale, spider mites and whiteflies are common houseplant pests. If you find insects, treat them with an appropriate insecticide before bringing them into the house. As always, read and follow all label directions of the product you select. Some insecticides will require a second application to break the lifecycle of the pest. The move to lower light will result in some plant stress, you may see some leaves yellowing or dropping as the plants acclimate.

Bring in any pots that can't take a freeze -- terra cotta, ceramic, and many plastic pots.

Keeping Holiday Plants Happy in the New Year

Many people enjoy the seasonal plants that we associate with Christmas – poinsettia, Christmas cactus and amaryllis – even after the holiday season has passed. With a little attention, these plants can be attractive for several months or even in subsequent seasons.

All three of these plants grow best in a brightly lit, warm (60 to 75 degree) area away from cold or dry drafts. Rotate pots a quart turn every couple of days to keep plants from bending towards the source of light. Like most houseplants, be careful not to overwater poinsettia, Christmas cactus or amaryllis. If these plants are kept too wet, the roots will rot. Water plants only when the surface of the soil feels dry to the touch and the container feels light when lifted.

Water plants in the sink with room temperature water. Remove pots from their saucers or foil wrappers before watering and water until it begins to drain out the bottom of the pot. Allow the plant to drain for several minutes before returning it to its saucer or wrapping and its normal location. Don't allow water to stand in saucers or foil wrappers between waterings. If your water is fluoridated, allow it to stand overnight before using it to water your plants. Also, don't use water treated by a water softener because it contains sodium which can harm plant roots.

Some plants keep better from one year to the next than others. Poinsettia rarely look as nice in their second season as they did their first. For most people, it makes more sense to compost poinsettias when they start to look ragged and buy

new ones next Christmas. On the other hand, Christmas cactus and amaryllis often get better year after year.

When your Christmas cactus finishes blooming, pinch a few segments off the end of each branch to encourage plants to stay full and lush instead of becoming leggy. The pinched segments can be easily rooted by sticking them in potting mix. As temperatures warm, feed your Christmas cactus with a pelleted slow release fertilizer or fertilize twice a month with a liquid fertilizer. Once the danger of frost has passed in the spring, you can move the Christmas cactus outdoors to a partially shaded location. Bring your cactus back indoors in October before the first threat of frost. Your cactus will begin to form buds as the day length shortens and should bloom again next Christmas.



Amaryllis grow well outside in our area. Keep your spent bulbs indoors until the spring; once the danger of frost has passed, plant bulbs in the landscape. Select a sunny to partially shaded site with well-drained soil. Your bulb probably will not bloom the first season it is in the ground but should return to its normal blooming cycle and flower the following spring. When planted outdoors, amaryllis bloom in the spring rather than in the winter. The bulbs are easy to grow, resistant to deer and voles and will gradually increase in size and number over time.



Choose and Cut Your Own Christmas Tree

If you are looking for a way to make memories this holiday season, consider taking the family out to choose and cut your own Christmas tree. You can enjoy an outing to a farm and give your children the opportunity to pick out their favorite tree. You can cut your tree (if you choose) and farm staff will help shake and bind the tree for transport home. It doesn't get much fresher or more local than that.

Several species are commonly grown as Christmas trees in eastern North Carolina. Eastern red cedar is the traditional southeast Christmas tree with its dark shiny green leaves and fresh cedar scent. White pine and Leyland cypress are also common. Many farms also offer precut Fraser fir, which are grown in great numbers in the mountains of western North Carolina. Your personal preference will determine which type of tree is right for you.

There are two Christmas tree farms in Onslow County that offer choose and cut Christmas trees:

Justice Christmas Tree Farm

1325 Gould Road
Jacksonville, NC 28540
Onslow County

Office Phone: (910) 346-6783

Mike's Farm & Country Store

1600 Haw Branch Road
Beulaville, NC 28518
Onslow County

Office Phone: (910) 324-3422

Berries Provide Color in the Winter Garden



Ilex vomitoria detail
Photo by Mary Keim, [CC BY-NC-SA - 2.0](#)

After the flowers and foliage of summer pass, berries can provide a welcome hit of color in the winter garden. Plants with berries that persist well in to winter provide an important food source for wildlife, particularly songbirds. Consider adding some of these plants to your garden.

Hollies are a clear standout in this category. While many species and cultivars are available commercially, we have several native plants that are outstanding landscape plants. Yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*) is a tough little plant. Depending on the selection, it may grow as a small shrub or a small tree. In tree form, it can grow to 15-20 feet tall with neat, small oval, evergreen leaves. While most selections have red berries, there are orange and even yellow-fruited selections. The berries persist well into winter.

Winterberry holly, *Ilex verticillata*, is another great option. This holly is deciduous, so when the leaves drop, the bright berries are very showy along the bare stems. Winterberry holly grows as a medium-sized shrub.

There are several species of beautyberry (genus *Callicarpa*) that flaunt purple,

lilac or white berries in the fall. The native beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) can be found growing wild along roadsides and in wood lines while Japanese beautyberries have been introduced in the landscape trade. Both make attractive, long-lived shrubs. These shrubs are really attractive all season long with small, pink blossoms in the spring, handsome green foliage during the summer, fall berries and an attractive, weeping form.



callicarpa japonica
harum-koh, CC-BY-SA-2.0

Another interesting group of shrubs are the viburnums. With more than 150 species and numerous cultivars, we can't cover them all! But these shrubs to small trees form berries that are a favorite of wild-life. Depending on the species, berries mature from red to blue or black. Witherod viburnum (*Viburnum cassinoides*) and Possumhaw viburnum (*Viburnum nudum*) are two native options to look for.

Of course, don't forget the tried and true options such as pyracantha (aka firethorn). Pyracantha is a rangy, vigorous growing shrub and lives up to its common name. If you opt to plant pyracantha, place it somewhere that the thorny shoots won't be an issue,

realizing that these plants can mature at 10 feet tall and ten feet wide. They are an effective screening option and, for the adventurous, can be espalied against a wall. The orange red berries persist well into winter.

Traditionally nandinas have provided excellent berries for fall and winter display and decoration. There are even varieties that produce yellow berries. However, research carefully as some of the newer dwarf varieties do not produce fruit.

Fall is an excellent time to plant shrubs so look around the garden. Do you have a space that needs a shot of late fall or winter color? If so, consider one of these shrubs to fill it!



Find 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 and you may hear your answer on the air.

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Upcoming Events

Decorating the Natural Way

November 7, 10 am

A Master Gardener Volunteer will discuss decorating with plant material and objects found in the yard and garden. Each person will go home with a small decoration that they can use for the holidays.



Onslow County Farmers Market Closes for the Season

The Onslow Farmers Market will close for the season on November 7. Come out and join us for our Fall Festival and to stock up on local goodies for the holiday season.

Onslow County Master Gardener Volunteer Yard Sale

November 7th 8:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.
Onslow County Extension Office

Please come out and support our Master Gardener Volunteers and fill up your baskets with “new to you” tools. The yard sale theme is “garden related items”. We will also be ordering the finest flower-bulbs from Terra Ceia Farms, in Pantego, NC. This event will be a blast! Shop and chat with fellow gardeners and the prices can’t be beat!



Do you want to become a Master Gardener Volunteer?

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!

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 inquires 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.

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.

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 and 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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Please remember to fill out the **2016 Mailing List Enrollment Form**

Failure to sign and return this form will mean that your name will be **REMOVED** from our postal mailing list effective April 20, 2016.

You may also email Kate @ akholt2@ncsu.edu to sign-up to receive your newsletter and information on upcoming events via email.



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