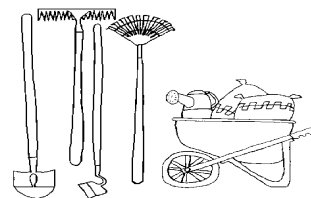


IN THE GARDEN NOW

HELPING GARDENERS PUT KNOWLEDGE TO WORK



January/February 2014

Upcoming Training Opportunities

Onslow County Master Gardener Volunteer Training starts January 22

Learn about gardening and help your community at the same time. 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.

Learn about a wide variety of gardening subjects including vegetables, fruits, lawn grass, 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 on Master Gardener projects throughout the community.

The 2014 Master Gardener Training Course begins January 22 and run through March 31. Classes will usually be taught Monday and Wednesday mornings from 9:00 am until noon. Cost for the course is \$100, which includes a comprehensive Master Gardener Manual. If you are interested, contact the North Carolina Cooperative Extension - Onslow County Center at (910) 455-5873, and request an application. Space in the class is limited.

HELP Garden Vegetable Production Class starts February 4

Learn to grow vegetables for your own use or for sale. This intensive, hands-on training will lead you through the process from site selection, soil testing and crop scheduling through harvest, storage and marketing and everything in between. Cost for the entire class is \$75 and you get to take fresh produce home with you too! The class meets each Tuesday night at the Extension Office from 5 to 7 pm. Call 910.455.5873 and ask for Larry Kent for more information.

Lisa Rayburn
Extension Agent,
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Contact Us:

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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.

Upcoming Community Classes

Growing Fruit in Onslow County

Learn to grow fruit successfully in Onslow County.

We'll discuss plant selection and care, common problems and how to avoid them.

January 11, 2 pm

Jacksonville Public Library

58 Doris Avenue East, Jacksonville, NC

To register: 910.455.7350

Spring Vegetable Gardening

We'll discuss everything you need to know to get started with your spring vegetable garden.

Topics will include site selection, bed preparation, crop scheduling and much more.

February 8, 9-11 am

Onslow County Parks and Recreation

100 Recreation Lane, Jacksonville, NC

To register: 910.938.5300

New Year Resolutions for Gardeners

The New Year is a time for looking back on the past, and even more importantly, forward to the coming year. It's a time to reflect on the changes we want or need to make and resolve to follow through on those changes. As gardeners there are steps that we can take to improve the ecology and sustainability of our landscapes. Consider adopting one or more of these resolutions for your garden in the New Year:

Plan your vegetable garden for year round production. In most coastal counties you can grow some sort of vegetable almost year round. Careful planning will provide you with produce to harvest year round – reducing your grocery bills and your carbon foot print.

Incorporate fruit and vegetable crops into your landscape. Fruit trees and blueberry bushes can be beautiful additions to the yard while also producing fruit. Small fruits like strawberries, and even vegetables, can be integrated into your sunny flowerbeds to add beauty and provide local produce.

Choose plants and varieties that are low maintenance and easy to grow in our area. Figs, muscadine grapes, rabbiteye blueberries and persimmons grow well in Onslow county. If you must grow pears, choose a variety that is resistant to fire blight (a common disease in our area) such as Seckel, Moonglow, Kieffer or Magness. Avoid planting crops that will require a

lot of pesticide sprays (like apples or many varieties of non-muscadine grapes) to produce a quality crop.

Commit to composting. Composting is a sustainable way of dealing with garden waste and household food scraps that provides you with a valuable soil amendment and can reduce your fertilizer and pesticide inputs in the garden. Use your compost to build your soil. Soils that are high in organic matter store water and nutrients better, improving plant growth and productivity.

Minimize carbon-emitting inputs to the garden. Gasoline-powered tools like lawn mowers and leaf blowers are obvious sources of carbon dioxide emissions but synthetic fertilizers and pesticides require a lot of energy to manufacture, package and transport. Weed, prune and rake leaves by hand when possible. Reduce pesticide and fertilizer use by choosing crops wisely and planting them in locations where they will thrive. Rotate vegetable crops annually to reduce insect and disease pressures. Test your soil and only apply nutrients that are needed.

Harvest, store and use your rainwater. Use cisterns or rainbarrels to collect the water that runs off your roof – use this water first to irrigate your lawn, garden and containerized plants.

Minimize your watering needs. Improve the

water holding capacity of your soil by adding organic matter. Mulch exposed soil in gardens and flowerbeds to suppress weeds and maintain soil moisture. When designing new plantings, choose plants that will be drought tolerant after establishment (crape myrtles, Chinese and Japanese hollies, junipers, many bulbs, Mediterranean herbs such as sage, rosemary and thyme, and many ornamental grasses just to name a few).

Consider adding chickens, bees or other small livestock to your yard. If you are up for the additional responsibility and commitment, chickens, ducks, guinea hens, rabbits or other small livestock help cycle nutrients in your garden. Carefully managed poultry can help control insect pests and weeds while providing nitrogen and phosphorus to improve soil fertility. Bees pollinate many of our vegetable crops – the loss of native pollinators makes the efforts of beekeepers even more important.

Whichever resolution you choose, I want to wish you and your garden a Happy New Year!

Disposing of your Christmas Tree and Holiday Recycling

If you have a chipper/shredder, your Christmas tree can become a part of your compost pile. If not, you will need to dispose of your Christmas tree appropriately. All yard waste, including real Christmas trees, is banned from North Carolina landfills. To facilitate disposal the Onslow County Solid Waste Department is accepting real Christmas trees (lights and ornaments removed) at the following sites:

- Folkstone Convenience Center Site at 320 Old Folkstone Rd, Holly Ridge (Sneads Ferry area just down the street from the Food Lion). Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 8am - 5:30pm (\$1.00 per tree).
- Swansboro Convenience Center Site at 698 Swansboro Loop Rd, Swansboro. Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 8am - 5:30pm (\$1.00 per tree).

- Onslow County Landfill (Tree and Wood Pallet Recycle Area) \$49.00 per ton. Monday-Saturday from 6:30am – 5pm.

Onslow County Solid Waste also recycles string lights, plastic containers, aluminum (cans, pie plates, foil), metal and glass containers, all paper and boxes for free. Electronics such as television monitors and microwaves can be recycled for \$3. For more information, contact the Onslow County Landfill at 910.989.2107.

Pruning Crape Myrtles

When it comes to pruning crape myrtles less is definitely more. Each February many otherwise plant-friendly people are possessed to cut and hack their crape myrtles in to submission. Despite the prevalence of this technique, it is not the best way to treat these sturdy, reliable plants.



Topping is a common but incorrect way to prune crape myrtle.
Photo by Karen Russ, ©HGIC, Clemson Extension.

Crape myrtles respond to this heavy pruning with a flush of small new branches and a heavy mop of foliage. This results in weak branches and an increased likelihood that the plant will weep over or break in a wind event. On the other hand, proper pruning enhances the natural form of the plant and develops structurally sound wood that is naturally resistant to high winds and storms.

Crape myrtles are actually low maintenance when it comes to care and pruning. The first step is to choose the correct size variety. There are hundreds of varieties of crape myrtles available that vary in both their mature size and growth form. When selecting a plant choose a variety that will fit within your space at maturity. Some crape myrtles are small shrubs at maturity (such as the variety Cherry Razzle Dazzle which matures at 2-3 feet high and wide) while others grow to large trees (example Townhouse that matures at 35-40 feet tall). Plants are like puppies – make sure you don't get a Great Dane if you are limited to Chihuahua spaces!

Likewise, varieties differ in their growth forms. Some varieties naturally develop several stems at the base and a shrub-like form. Others tend towards growing one or two trunks and a natural tree form. Choose a variety that naturally wants to grow in your preferred form.

At planting time make sure you plant the crown (the juncture between the roots and the base of the trunk) even with the surface of the soil or slightly elevated (no more than an inch above the surface of the soil). If the crown is planted too low plants may respond by sending up sprouts from the base which will need to be pruned out.

Once you have chosen the correct variety for your planting location your pruning is really limited to promoting the natural form of the plant. In February or early March remove any dead, diseased or dying branches from the plant. Also, look for and remove branches that cross over and rub within the canopy of the plant (particularly if it is tree-form). Undesirable sprouts can be removed at any point through the season.



Well pruned crape myrtle with natural form.
Karen Russ, ©HGIC, Clemson Extension

If desired, you can prune spent flower heads or mature seed heads from small plants. On larger specimens this is not practical and isn't necessary. The plant will shed its old seed heads when it resumes growth in the spring.

If you need to remove a large limb or trunk remove it at the base with a clean pruning cut. Avoid heading back large limbs and leaving stubs, crape myrtles respond to this sort of pruning cut with a mass of new shoots resulting in lopsided growth.

Tips and Tasks

Prune back ornamental grasses and ground covers in early February before new growth starts. Add mulch to beds if needed.

Scale can be a problem on hollies and other shrubbery outside and on house plants indoors. Scale are small, hardbodied insects that often look like bumps on the bark or leaves of the plant. Scale on landscape plants can be treated with horticultural oils. Follow the label directions and use the spray rate recommended for the time of year. Acephate (Orthene), carbaryl or insecticidal soap can also be used. Insecticidal soap is a good choice for scale on houseplants. A second treatment after two weeks is generally needed to control newly emerged scale insects.

Plants naturally change color in the winter and even evergreens, like azaleas, gardenias and camellias, can experience yellowing. Older leaves naturally yellow and drop off. If azaleas are discolored and the leaves show stippling (tiny discolored spots), spider mites could be the culprit. Spider mites can be controlled with horticultural oil or insecticidal soap.

Dormant pruning of fruit trees and grapevines should be done in February as should heavy pruning and rejuvenation pruning of most ornamental shrubs. Remember to wait and prune spring flowering shrubs such as azaleas and forsythia after they bloom.

If using a preemergent herbicide to control summer annual weeds (including crabgrass) in your lawn, aim to apply it around Valentine's Day. If these

chemicals are applied too late, you will not get adequate weed control. Read and follow all label directions. Avoid weed-and-feed formulations and wait until mid-May to June to fertilize warm season lawns.

If you are battling Florida betony, remember to apply herbicides in February before the plant starts developing its distinctive tubers.

Remove leaves and debris from lawns. Do not burn St. Augustine, centipede, or zoysiagrass lawns. Irrigation is usually not necessary during the winter months. The optimum time to seed or lay sod for a warm season lawn is in the spring from about April until July 1.

Plan your spring vegetable garden. Cool season crops need to be planted early enough to harvest before the heat of summer hits. Beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard greens, onion, garden peas, potatoes, radishes, spinach and turnips can all be planted in February for spring harvest.

Discovery Garden Update



White pine donated by Justice Christmas Tree Farm.

As many of you know, we have been working hard to establish a 4-acre teaching garden behind the Extension office here at the Onslow County Multi-Purpose Complex.

After years of laying the groundwork, Master Gardener Volunteers are enjoying planting and maintaining the gardens.

It has been a little too cold for planting lately but we have still been working in the gardens. In early December the Master Gardener Volunteers had a

workday to remove dead foliage and mulch the existing plantings so they would be neat and tidy through the winter. They also erected a Christmas tree in the Garden. The tree is a white pine that was grown in Onslow County and donated to us by Justice Christmas Tree Farm.



Laying the underdrain.

One of the biocels, part of our Low Impact Design storm water management system, wasn't draining as well we had hoped. As mentioned in the previous update biocels function as large rain gardens – they collect storm water and allow it to slowly infiltrate in to the soil instead of running off. Because of a layer of clay underneath this cel was draining too slowly. So with the oversight of our engineer we installed an under drain and added more sand to the cel. After monitoring the cel for several rain events we will develop an updated plant list for the cel and plant it in early spring.



The finished biocel, ready for spring planting.

Another accomplishment in the gardens was field routing the path for the boardwalk through the woods. We carefully walked the proposal path several times and flagged its route so the surveyors can come through and plot it on the map. We laid the boardwalk out carefully to both highlight and preserve the native plants we have on this site. We hope to have the boardwalk completed this spring.

Progress comes slowly but surely in the Discovery Gardens!

Be on the Lookout for Fungus Gnats

Midwinter is a common time to notice fungus gnats. These little insects are so small they can be difficult to see but you may notice them flying up from your houseplants or resting on the leaves.

Adult fungus gnats are tiny, dark insects that resemble mosquitoes but are smaller – in the range of 1/16 to 1/8 inch long. Fungus gnats are not strong fliers so they tend to remain near potted plants and can frequently be found walking on the surface of the soil. While fungus gnats can occur anytime of year and are common outside. They are often noticed after houseplants have been brought back in after spending the summer outdoors.

Once established the larvae of fungus gnats are found in the potting mix, feeding on the plant roots. The adults consume very little devoting most of their energy to mating and laying eggs.

The best way to control fungus gnats in houseplants is to modify the habitat to remove their breeding grounds. Fungus gnats require moist, organic soil so be careful to avoid overwatering your plants. The surface of the soil should dry out to the touch and the container should feel light for its size before watering. Do not allow any water to stand in saucers or decorative outer pots. Also avoid using incompletely composted organic matter in potting soil and remove dropped leaves, flowers and other plant debris as they fall on the surface of the potting mix.

There are several other control options available as well but they tend to be hard to find. The use of beneficial nematodes and the beneficial bacteria

Bacillus thuringiensis subspecies *israelensis* (BTI) can help control fungus gnats, however, these options can be hard for homeowners to find. While adult fungus gnats can be controlled with an application of pyrethrin or pyrethroid based insecticides, this does not eliminate the larvae in the soil and will not effectively break the lifecycle of this pest.

Japanese Maples Add Winter Interest

By Barbara Walters, Master Gardener Volunteer

Is your garden stuck in the doldrums of winter?...but wait, take another look! Have you got a Japanese maple in your yard? If so, then you have winter beauty galore. That magnificent and stately tree of spring, summer and fall is just as gorgeous and beautiful in the winter months. The birds absolutely love it (as does most everyone else) and use it as a winter home.

There is a Japanese maple to suit every desire and location. From tall and lush to small and bonsai, with leaves that are split and airy to those that are full and closed, with colors running the full color spectrum from very pale green to the very deepest, darkest purple and all shades in between.

In winter without their beautiful leaves they are just as majestic as you see their stately branches making a pattern of cobwebs against a grey, sullen sky. Tucked within those branches you will usually find a birds nest or two as an extra bonus. Some varieties, particularly the Coral Bark Japanese Maple also add a dash of color to an otherwise somber landscape with vibrantly colored bark.

If you are fortunate enough to have a Japanese maple that you can see from an inside window, lucky you!! Now is the time to go and enjoy. If you don't have one and are looking for the ideal spot just remember, they need moist, well-drained soil, and prefer morning sun with a little afternoon shade.

Recipe Corner – Winter Squash Soup with Gruyere Croutons

This soup will warm you up on a cold winter evening! Properly cured winter squash will store for several months in a cool room. Thyme and sage will both overwinter outside in the ground or in a large container. And who wouldn't love cheesy gruyere croutons??

Winter Squash Soup

1/2 stick butter
1 large onion, finely chopped
4 large garlic cloves, chopped
6 cups chicken broth
4 cups 1-inch pieces peeled butternut squash (about 1 1/2 pounds)
4 cups 1-inch pieces peeled acorn squash (about 1 1/2 pounds)
1 1/4 teaspoons minced fresh thyme
1 1/4 teaspoons minced fresh sage
1/4 cup whipping cream
2 teaspoons sugar

Melt butter in large pot over medium heat. Add onion and garlic and sauté until tender, about 10 minutes. Add broth, all squash and herbs; bring to boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer until squash is very tender, about 20 minutes.

Working in batches, puree soup in blender. Return soup to same pot. Stir in cream and sugar; bring to simmer. Season with salt and pepper. (Can be made 1 day ahead. Chill. Rewarm over medium heat before serving.)

Gruyère Croutons

1/4 stick butter
24 1/4-inch-thick baguette bread slices
1 cup grated Gruyère cheese
1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme
1 teaspoon minced fresh sage

Preheat broiler. Butter 1 side of each bread slice. Arrange bread, buttered side up, on baking sheet. Broil until golden, about 1 minute. Turn over. Sprinkle cheese, then thyme and sage over. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Broil until cheese melts, about 1 minute. Ladle soup into bowls. Top each with croutons and serve.

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