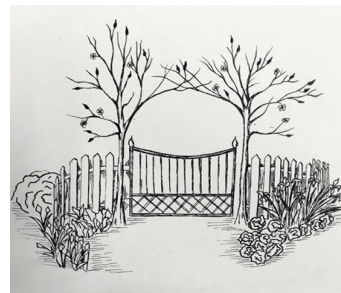


IN THE GARDEN NOW

HELPING GARDENERS PUT KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

April 2016



The Tomato Challenge

-Charlotte Glen

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If you have had little success with tomatoes don't take it personally. Tomatoes are tough to grow in the coastal south. Summer heat causes problems with ripening, fruit set, and flavor, yet allows diseases and pests to thrive. While we can't change the weather, there are some things that can be done at planting time to increase your chances of success.

Plant Early

Tomatoes grow and produce best when daytime temperatures range from 70 to 80 degrees, and night temperatures fall between 60 to 70 degrees. Most of our summer days far exceed these spring like temperatures, causing plants to shed their blossoms without setting fruit. Fruits that do ripen when high's reach into the mid 90's have less flavor, ripen unevenly, and often develop hard white areas inside their flesh. Planting tomatoes as early as possible will give plants more time to grow and produce under ideal temperatures before the hottest part of summer.

Mid to late April are the best time to plant tomatoes in Onslow County. Keep in mind light frosts are a possibility through the end of April, so be prepared to protect plants if temperatures in the 30's are predicted. Covering plants with an old sheet or specially made row covers will protect them down to 30 degrees. Make sure covers extend fully to the ground and are well anchored.

Plant Deep

Tomatoes are one of the few vegetables that have the ability to produce roots along their stem. Because of this, setting the root ball two or three inches deeper than soil level at planting time will result in plants with larger, more extensive root systems. If you have plants with long leggy stems do not bury the roots several inches deep. Instead, dig a shallow trench and plant them lying sideways, so the leggy part of the stem is planted horizontally two to three inches below soil level. Allow the top six to ten inches of the plant to stick up out of the soil. You can make a mound of soil at the end of the trench to help the top part of the plant tilt upward, but don't worry if it is not perfectly vertical to start with. The sun will draw the plants upright within a few days.

Tomatoes grow best in deep, rich soils so be sure to amend your garden with compost before planting. Space tomato plants at least three feet apart and place a cage around plants to support them as they grow. Mulching the soil under and around tomatoes will help keep soil moisture even and prevent soil temperatures from getting too hot.

Plant Several Varieties

There are a plethora of different varieties of tomatoes available, including heirlooms, cherry tomatoes, and the typical round red types. There is no one, best variety to grow in our area. Cherry tomatoes are the easiest to grow and every garden should include at least a few of these highly productive plants. Many people love the flavor of heirlooms but not all heirlooms produce well in our summer heat. If you would like to try heirlooms look for 'German Johnson' or 'Homestead', both of which produce well in the south.

Of the modern round large fruited tomato types 'Celebrity' and 'Better Boy' are favorites for the south. Both produce medium to large size fruits and are resistant to fusarium and nematodes, two common soil dwelling diseases that attack tomato roots. For even more disease resistance include a couple of varieties that are resistant to tomato spotted wilt virus, such as 'Southern Star', 'Amelia', or 'Crista'. Planting disease resistant varieties will increase your chance of success, but keep in mind no one tomato variety is resistant to all, or even most, of the diseases that commonly plague this popular crop.

If you have room, plant tomatoes in several different spots around your yard, rather than all together in one bed. Avoid planting tomatoes in the same location year after year since this allows diseases to build up. If you have had problems with tomato wilt diseases in the past, consider potting plants in large containers filled with potting soil. Whether you plant in containers or garden beds, be sure to apply a slow release fertilizer when you plant. Slow release fertilizers include organic fertilizers like Plant Tone as well as time release products like Osmocote. Supplementing plants with liquid fertilizers like compost tea or Miracle Gro for the first few weeks after planting will help them establish quickly, but there is no need to liquid feed plants all season. In fact, over fertilizing reduces fruit set and encourages problems like blossom end rot.

Spring Lawn Care Tasks to Avoid

—Danny Lauderdale



As temperatures warm, many homeowners who do their own lawn care are ready to get their lawns off to a good start for the growing season. Unfortunately, some tasks done in the spring are not needed and can cause damage to warm-season lawns. If you have bermudagrass, centipede, St. Augustine, or zoysia, then pay attention to what not to do in early spring to get your lawn off to a great start and finish in 2016.

- First, avoid weed-and-feed products on warm-season lawns during March and April. These months are not the right ones to fertilize warm-season grasses, and the weeds growing at this time are winter annual weeds that are near maturity and difficult to control.
- Avoid spraying lawns with weed killers during lawn green-up. Again, weeds are large and difficult to control, and many grasses are sensitive during green-up. Control winter weeds in February, and wait until May to start on summer weeds.
- Do not fertilize most warm-season lawns until May. If disease issues have occurred in past springs, such as large patch in centipede, wait until June.
- Do not use a power rake, verticutter, or motorized dethatcher on your centipede or St. Augustine lawn. Because these grasses spread by surface runners only, these devices cause too much damage. Core aerification with hollow tines in May or June is a better option. Many companies offer this service, and core aerators are available at many rental centers.
- Avoid spring treatment for white grubs; fall is a better control time.
- While damage from large patch is obvious now, hold off on applying fungicides until late summer. This disease will stop developing as soil temperatures rise above 70° F. Applying fungicides now is not necessary nor very effective.

Keep it clean and green out there! For more information on turfgrass, see www.turffiles.ncsu.edu or content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook/9-lawns. Or download the NC State University Lawn Care app: www.lawncares.ncsu.edu.

Onslow County Farmers' Market Opens for the 2016 Season – April 9



The Onslow County Farmers' Market will open for the 2016 season on April 9th at its 4024 Richlands Highway location. The market offers fresh, local fruits, vegetables, meats, eggs, wine, cheese, and baked goodies as well as a variety of handcrafted items including soaps, skin care products and crafts.

The Onslow County Farmers' Market operates at three different locations on different days of the week. Market locations and times are:

- Saturdays at 4024 Richlands Highway from 8:30 until 1:30
- Tuesdays aboard Camp Lejeune in front of the commissary from 10 until 2
- Thursdays on Western Boulevard in front of Big Lots from 10 until 2

Come out and support your local farmers and crafters. To learn more about the Farmers' Market and upcoming special events, check out their website or follow their Facebook page for more details:

<http://onslowncfarmersmarket.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Onslow-County-Farmers-Market/111126258908994>

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 and you may hear your answer on the air.

Designing for Small Spaces

—Donna Teasley



Trellised plants can make a delightful focal point, and a sitting area gives visitors a destination. © Wolterk, bigstockphoto.com

Times are changing. Homes with an acre lot aren't the norm any longer. As we get older, I'm not sure we want lawns that large anyway! But if you have a gardener's spirit, it is difficult to give up precious growing space. Whether your forte is flowers, shrubs, or veggies, it isn't easy to decide which plant to delete from the garden.

Much can be done with a small space, if you just teach yourself to think a little differently. First of all, think vertical. Vines of all kinds give wonderful color and texture to a garden, whether ornamental or edible.

When planted in containers, plants are mobile, which means they can become even more adaptable to a space. Think of shade for a hot summer's day or even a wind or noise barrier where a vine in a pot can serve double duty.



Plants with a variety of leaf sizes and textures give the impression of more space. © Mandy Jansen, Creative Commons, cc-by-nc-nd20

When trying to design for a small area, remember that upright and columnar plants can give the illusion of space. Using plants with a variety of leaf sizes and textures makes a bold statement and gives the impression of lots of space.

Use interesting visual elements such as paving stones or boardwalks to break up open areas into smaller individual spaces.

Have one or two destinations in the landscape with a path leading to them, such as a sitting area or perhaps a water feature with a bench or a swing. This gives visitors a place to go. With a destination in sight, the walk through the garden will seem longer.

Throw in some interesting design elements along the way—such as unusual containers or a piece of artwork like a simple sculpture. These distractions will keep the eye moving from place to place and give the feeling of a much larger space.

Color is also a great way to make a garden feel bigger. Bold colors catch our attention initially, making the remaining landscape recede in the distance and thereby giving the illusion of space.

The use of dwarf plants is another way to save space. Take advantage of a wall or a structure by using some espalier plants. These don't take much room and certainly give an interesting look to a growing shrub or tree. Trellised plants can also be a delightful surprise and can add architectural interest to the landscape while using space efficiently.

A downsized garden can give just as much pleasure as a large one. Although downsizing might take a little more planning, isn't that half of the fun?

April Gardening Classes

Do you want to get out and in the garden this spring? Need a little help getting started? Join us for our April gardening classes.

Easy Container Vegetables and How to Grow Them - April 9, 10 am - noon
If you don't have a lot of space but want to grow some vegetables, this class is for you. We will discuss easy container vegetables and how to grow them. If the weather cooperates, we will plant some containers out in the Discovery Garden.

Spring Garden Symposium -

April 23, 8 - 1:30 pm

The Master Gardeners will have plants, crafts and yard sale items for sale and be available to answer your gardening questions. Classes will run through the morning:

- **Building a Raised Bed Garden, 10 am**
- **Growing Vegetables in Raised Beds, 11 am**
- **Harvesting Rain Water, 12 noon**

Hypertufa Workshop -

April 30, 10 am - noon

Learn how to make beautiful planting containers out of hypertufa - a lightweight, cement substitute. Master Gardeners will help you create your own container that you can take home for summer planting. Cost \$15. Preregistration is required, call 910.455.5873 to reserve your space.

Association Meetings

Onslow County Farmers Market Association

April 5, 4 pm

Onslow County Extension Office

Contact: Lisa Davila, 787.460.0337 or lisaonslowmarket@gmail.com

Onslow County Beekeepers Association

April 12, 7 pm

Onslow County Extension Office

Contact: Jeff Morton, 910.330.5732 or jeff_morton@ncsu.edu

Onslow County Master Gardener Volunteer Association

April 14, 9 am

Onslow County Extension Office

Contact: Lisa Rayburn, 910.455.5873 or lisa_rayburn@ncsu.edu

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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