



# Extension Gardener

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Spring 2009

Empowering  
gardeners.  
Providing  
garden  
solutions.

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## Butterfly Gardens Enliven the Landscape

**G**rowing a garden is a satisfying project. When plants bloom and thrive, they bring constant pleasure to the gardener who has spent many hours on hands and knees tending them. Added pleasures in home gardens are the creatures that make their homes among the flowers. One of the most enchanting of these creatures is the butterfly. A welcome visitor to any garden, the butterfly's whimsical frolic among the plants growing there brings a smile to anyone who may be watching.

There are many different butterflies throughout the world, including the 160 species that occur in North Carolina. When they enter a garden, they are looking for two things: nectar and host plants. Nectar is a major food source for butterflies, and a host plant is a specific plant upon which a butterfly will lay her eggs. This host plant must also serve as food for hatching caterpillars. To encourage butterflies in your garden, these two requirements must be met.

What types of flowers appeal to butterflies? Brightly colored blooms will attract them, and fragrance is also a factor. Most butterflies must land on a flower to drink, so they like those with large petals or tight clusters of flowers. They also seem to prefer mass plantings of single colors rather than a hodgepodge of mixed colors. As

butterflies are present all season long, plants that flower for a long time are preferred.

To ensure the presence of butterflies, plant some host plants in or near the garden. Each species of butterfly is very specific about the types of plants its caterpillars will consume. Become familiar with the types of butterflies that frequent your area and the host plants they require. Decide where you will put your butterfly habitat and how much space to devote to it before selecting plants. Choose a sunny location. Most butterflies are active only in the sun, and many plants that host caterpillars or produce nectar for adult butterflies grow well in sunny habitats. Include some tall plants and shrubs that will help to shelter butterflies from wind and rain.

Butterflies like to have a place to get warm in the mornings, so flat, dark-colored rocks for them to sun on will encourage them to visit. Also, an area on the ground that can be kept moist is helpful so that visiting butterflies can drink water and absorb minerals from wet soil. Enjoy your butterfly garden and the visitors that it will attract. For a list of plants that attract butterflies and more information about butterfly gardens, see *Butterflies in Your Backyard*: [www.ces.ncsu.edu/forestry/pdf/ag/ag636\\_02.pdf](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/forestry/pdf/ag/ag636_02.pdf)

— Donna Teasley



*Sleepy orange skipper*  
JC Raulston Arboretum



*Eastern tiger swallowtail*  
JC Raulston Arboretum



*Spicebush swallowtail*  
JC Raulston Arboretum

## Upcoming Events

April 7, Controlling the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, Burke County Ag Bldg., Morganton, 6:00 – 8:00 PM, 828.439.4460

April 9, Growing Annuals & Perennials, Burke County Ag Bldg., Morganton, 6:00 – 8:00 PM, 828.439.4460

April 13, Build Your Own Patio Fountain, Bullington Center, Hendersonville, 1:00 – 3:00 PM, 828.697.4891

April 14, Beginning Gardening Series, Ag Conference Center, Boone, 828.264.3061

April 14, Support Landscape Tree Health, The N.C. Arboretum, Asheville, 8:30 AM – 12:30 PM

April 14, Farmland Preservation, Cedar Springs Baptist Church, Zirconia, 7:30 – 9:30 PM, 828.697.4891

April 18, Backyard Rain Garden Work Shop, Henderson County Extension Center, Hendersonville, 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM, 828.697.4891

April 18, Container Gardening, Ace Hardware, Morganton, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM, 828.439.4460

April 23, Weeds in the Home Lawn, Burke County Ag Bldg., Morganton, 6:00 – 8:00 PM, 828.439.4460

April 24 – 25, Plant Show and Sale, Bullington Center, Hendersonville, 828.698.6104

April 27, Vegetable Gardening in WNC, Bullington Center, Hendersonville, 1:00 – 2:00 PM, 828.697.4891

April 30, Mini Garden Project, Ag Resources Center, Newton, 6:15 – 8:00 PM, 828.465.8240

May 6, Pesticide Disposal Day, Caldwell Ag Center, Lenoir, 828.757.1291

May 11, So You Think You Know How to Plant, Bullington Center, Hendersonville, 1:00 – 2:00 PM, 828.697.4891

May 16, Controlling Pests in the Vegetable Garden, Ace Hardware, Morganton, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM, 828.439.4460

Sustainable Gardening — *Planning a garden and landscape*

**W**e hear a lot these days about sustainable living. What does “sustainable” mean to the gardener? Hopefully, it means we plan for our gardening practices to benefit both the environment and the gardener. With wise planning, you can have a landscape and gardens that are attractive and easy to maintain. Each quarter we will be sharing some tips on sustainable gardening. Let’s get started by considering these practices:

- Select plants carefully. Planting the right plant in the right place can prevent a lot of problems down the road. A happy plant is a healthy plant.
- Use less fertilizer. Excess fertilizer is not only wasteful, it can stress plants, can make them less drought tolerant, and risks contaminating water supplies.
- Use slow-release fertilizer. Nitrogen applied in a slowly released form greatly reduces the risks of fertilizer runoff.
- Manage pests sensibly. Identify pests and learn the least toxic way to manage them. Do those insects really warrant control measures?
- Use fewer pesticides. Random use of pesticides may kill beneficial insects and pose other

environmental consequences. Using pesticides unnecessarily is also a waste of money and more work for the gardener.

- Minimize and manage irrigation. Implement xeriscaping techniques to reduce the amount of water needed in the landscape. Water only when needed, and apply water efficiently.
- Practice water harvesting. Install rain barrels or cisterns to reduce your use of municipal or well water.
- Control stormwater runoff.
- Mulch correctly. The right amount of mulch looks nice, reduces weeds and helps reduce water needs.
- Include more native plants. Many native plants are particular about their location – sunlight, soil type, soil drainage. Plant them where they will adapt well and provide beneficial wildlife habitat.
- Recycle yard waste. Composting is the best way to dispose of yard waste, besides providing a wonderful soil amendment.

—Linda Blue

Food Production — *Local foods a national phenomenon*

**O**ne of the newest words in the dictionary is “locavore,” a term that refers to someone who emphasizes eating local food, typically produced within a few miles of home. Some folks have followed a plan where they did this for a set period of time, trying to buy as little nonlocal food as possible.

Most consumers aren’t ready for such a plan, but many have really enjoyed the renewed emphasis on local food. It’s hard to pick up any newspaper these days without seeing an article on this subject.

The advantages of local food include freshness and quality. There’s often the chance to talk to the farmer and find out exactly how your food was grown. Money spent with that farmer re-circulates in the community, magnifying its benefit to the local economy. It’s also nice to know that there was much less energy used to

transport the food from the farm to you.

One result of the local food initiative is the increase in farmers’ markets. Many counties now have more than one market. Some producers sell on the farm itself. Others make use of community supported agriculture (CSA) and deliver packages of edibles to their clients throughout the season. Farmers are also selling their products to restaurants and chefs, who are proud to tout the sources of these menu items.

You can find local food growers via lots of Web sites, such as [www.carolinafarmstewards.org](http://www.carolinafarmstewards.org), [www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org), [www.buyappalachian.org](http://www.buyappalachian.org), and [www.foothillsfresh.com](http://www.foothillsfresh.com). Your local Extension Center can also help you locate these farms.

—Kevin Starr

## Garden Spot — Bullington Center

The Bullington Center is a horticultural educational facility that was once the home and thriving nursery business of Bob Bullington. The 12-acre property was donated to the Henderson County Education Foundation to be used for horticultural education. A visit to the Bullington Center is a delight to anyone who appreciates the beauty and texture of flowers, ornamental and evergreen shrubs, and trees. The center's unique, natural setting changes with each new season.

The site features unusual cultivated plants from Asia. Native azaleas, meadows, and a nature trail wind through a mixed forest and rhododendron thicket, partially along a stream. The existing gardens include colorful perennial borders, a butterfly garden, a shade garden, and an herb garden containing fragrant herbs and dye, medicinal and biblical herbs.

The Center hosts field trips, classes and workshops for elementary students, including



plant math, seed education, and plant-insect interaction. The Center also has weather instruments, grow lights, and compost bins that can be used for class experiments and projects. 4-H youth raise pumpkins, and the Boys and

Girls Club grows a summer vegetable garden. Adult workshops cover such topics as wildflower identification, plant propagation, pruning and basic gardening.

The most recent addition to the grounds of the Bullington Center is the therapy garden, which offers horticultural therapy programs to elderly and disabled populations. This garden brings hope through specifically designed gardening activities. For more information, visit [www.bullingtoncenter.org](http://www.bullingtoncenter.org).

—Diane Turner

**Native azaleas (above) are part of a mixed forest and rhododendron thicket at the Bullington Center.** (Piedmont azalea. Photo courtesy JC Raulston Arboretum)

## Environmental Stewardship — Basic practices

What is environmental stewardship? It is a way of living that shows respect for the environment and for others that live around us. This is just one broad definition of environmental stewardship. The truth is that there are many different answers to this question, and probably most of them would be correct. We have just one earth. As its inhabitants, we have a responsibility to keep it working properly. We must live in a manner that gives the earth an opportunity to replenish its resources faster than we use them up.

Everyone can take part in this style of living, whether it is recycling to keep plastic water bottles out of landfills or using correct fertilizing techniques to keep unsafe levels of fertilizer from finding their way to the water supply. In short, environmental stewardship is caring about what those who come after us will find. There are things that each of us can do without put-

ting ourselves to any trouble in the day-to-day process of living:

- Keep the car tuned up.
- Drink water from a glass instead of a plastic water bottle.
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn.
- Follow label directions when using a pesticide, and use it only as a last resort.
- Dispose of used batteries correctly.
- Compost whenever possible.
- Recycle.

None of the things listed above would be difficult for us to do each day. All it takes is the desire to improve our environment and the hope that future generations will be able to enjoy the simple pleasures of living on this Planet Earth.

—Donna Teasley

# Tips & Tasks

## MARCH

- Collect soil samples and have them analyzed.
- Fertilize asparagus, perennials, small shade trees, shrubs, and ornamental grasses.
- Finish pruning the home orchard, and apply dormant spray before buds swell.
- Plant cool-weather vegetables, roses, trees, shrubs and fruit trees.
- Apply pre-emergence herbicides for crabgrass.
- Replenish mulch to maintain a 2 – 4-inch layer.
- Divide and transplant perennials.

## APRIL

- Spray dogwood trees to protect from anthracnose as buds open.
- Start a combination spray program in orchards.
- Control broadleaf weeds in lawns.
- Re-define edges of plant borders.
- Fruit trees with no crop will require less fertilizer than those with a full crop.
- If needed, trim spring-flowering trees after blooms fade.
- Cut out any winter damage.
- Spray for azalea lacebug, boxwood leaf miner, camellia tea scale, euonymus scale, hemlock and juniper spider mites and hybrid-rhododendron borer.

## MAY

- Sidedress vegetables 6 to 8 weeks after germination.
- Fertilize warm-season grasses.
- Prune early blooming shrubs after flowers fade.
- Treat lacebugs on azaleas, pyracantha and rhododendron.
- Control broadleaf weeds.
- Use caution near snake habitats.
- Plant annual and summer bulbs and warm-season vegetables.

—Don Breedlove



JC Raulston Arboretum

## Showstopper—'Ruby' Lorapetalum

Chinese fringe flower *Lorapetalum chinense* 'Ruby' is an ever-green (or should we say "ever-red") shrub that adds pizzazz to any landscape. Its ruby-red new growth in spring darkens to a deep-burgundy by autumn. Each April, bright pink clusters of fringe-shaped flowers appear to complement the colorful foliage, making this plant a true Showstopper.

Loropetalum or Chinese fringe flower will grow in sun or part shade. Most will easily grow 8 feet tall and wide. 'Ruby' is considered to be one of the more compact cultivars, reaching a mature height of only 5 feet. If another variety is overgrown, prune it into a small, spreading tree.

Use this versatile shrub in an informal hedge, to screen an undesirable view, or with other plants in a shrub border. Once established, 'Ruby' and the other loropetalums are very drought tolerant. —John Vining and Mark Blevins

## Sustainability

### Honeybees

Be a better hive neighbor, and conserve the honeybees that pollinate our farms and gardens. Honeybees fly from early morning to early evening, collecting nectar, pollen, and water for the hive. If you must apply pesticides, do so in the evening after the bees have gone to bed. Avoid spraying flowers the bees may visit, and avoid powdered pesticides. The bees may collect the powder the next day (as though it were pollen) and return it to the hive with devastating results.

If you see a spring swarm (a large ball of honeybees hanging from a limb, a porch rail, or the eaves of your home), don't panic. Undisturbed honeybees in a new swarm are usually quite calm. Call your local beekeepers club or your Cooperative Extension center immediately to find a beekeeper who will move the bees to a new hive.

—Anne Edwards

## Pest Alert — Fire Ants Must Be Monitored

North Carolina's imported fire ant infestation continues to expand, partly because of recent mild winters. Increased residential and industrial development and infestations of fire ants in sod and nursery stock are also factors.

Although red imported fire ants are a nuisance, ants in general are beneficial insects that help to degrade waste and eat other insects. Researchers recommend spot-treating each mound instead of trying to eradicate all fire ants by broadcasting baits over large areas. Native ants will defend their territory and help to prevent red imported fire ants from spreading.

Control is designed around killing the queen. While she lives, she will lay hundreds of eggs daily. It can take several weeks to kill all

the ants in a mound. Fire ant baits and liquid drenches are effective when properly applied. Apply drenches in high-use areas where people are likely to be stung. Ants that come in contact with the liquid pesticide die immediately. There are no guarantees, however, that the queen will come in contact with the pesticide. If she does not die, the mound will survive.

While you may be successful in destroying a fire ant mound, monitoring for future mounds is very important. Don't expect 100% control. New queens will always develop and start new mounds. For more information about fire ants, visit [www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/Urban/ifa.htm](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/Urban/ifa.htm)

—Karen Neill

## Incredible Edible—Blueberries

Blueberries are a wonderful addition to any North Carolina yard! They can be incorporated into the landscape as hedges or planted in mixed borders. You can find out which varieties are recommended for your area from your local Extension center. Regardless of variety, all blueberries require acidic soils to grow well. Testing your soil to find out your pH before planting is critical to success. Blueberries prefer a soil pH of around 4.5. They also need good drainage, but don't like to dry out. Mix composted organic matter into your soil to help retain enough moisture to keep plants healthy.

Plant on a mound to improve soil drainage. Blueberries produce best in full sun. They will also do well in part shade, as long as they get at least 4 hours of sunlight each day.

—Charlotte Glenn



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Managing Editor **Will Strader**  
 Content Editor **David Goforth**  
 Regional Editors  
 Coastal Plain **Anne Edwards**,  
**Charlotte Glenn**  
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Red imported fire ant