

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE &amp; LIFE SCIENCES

NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Helping  
Carolinians  
Increase Their  
Knowledge of  
Gardening,  
Manage Their  
Landscape  
Investment &  
Protect the  
Environment

## Oakleaf Hydrangea Boasts Bold Features

**H**ydrangea *quercifolia*, oakleaf hydrangea, provides bold texture and beautiful, fragrant flowers in the summer and great leaf color in the fall, characteristics most of us want in our gardens. Old-fashioned big-leaved hydrangeas have been in gardens throughout the country for decades but this one is lesser known.

The deep green leaves of this woody ornamental are tropical in appearance and are sure to get attention. The leaves can reach 8-inches long and 6-inches wide with deep lobes. The leaves alone make this plant a unique attraction but that is just the beginning. The plant's creamy white, fragrant, erect flower clusters appear in May, June and July and are huge, sometimes 12-inches long and 4-inches wide. The flowers persist just like the old-fashioned hydrangeas and can be used in dried arrangements. In the fall, the leaves change to shades of red, orangish brown and purple, providing beautiful color well into the season.

Oakleaf hydrangea prefers moist, fertile, well-drained soil but will tolerate more poorly drained conditions. Full sun or partial shade is best, especially if the roots are kept cool. It does not do well in very dry areas. There are no serious pest or disease problems with oakleaf hydrangea, with the exception of a Japanese beetle now and then.

This plant makes a striking statement in the garden. With its bold features, be sure to find a place where it will not overpower smaller plants. Many gardeners do not realize that it can grow up to 8 feet in height and spread as wide and maybe wider. Cutting the canes back every three years can help manage the overall size. The plant will produce suckers from roots and continue to expand if allowed. If you want a single-stemmed plant, keep the suckers in check or look for a dwarf variety such as 'PeeWee' which grows to only about 4 feet. **Carl Matyac**

Robert E. Lyons ©



Robert E. Lyons ©

## Hydrangea Varieties on View

**T**he J.C. Raulston Arboretum at N.C. State University is an excellent location to view several varieties of oakleaf hydrangea. Take a look at the straight species and compare it with other cultivars on site. 'Alison' has spectacular burgundy fall color, 'Harmony' boasts some of the largest flower clusters and 'Snow

Queen' holds its flowers upright against dark green foliage. The arboretum is located at 4301 Beryl Road in Raleigh and is open all year from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. For more information e-mail [Sandie\\_Holdan@ncsu.edu](mailto:Sandie_Holdan@ncsu.edu), visit the website at [www.arb.ncsu.edu](http://www.arb.ncsu.edu) or call (919) 515-3132.

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## Commonly Asked Questions About Tree Care

### Do I need to apply tree paint to tree wounds?

No. Trees have their own defensive chemicals to seal damage and decay. Tree paint provides no benefit and sometimes inhibits the sealing process.

### Aren't the most important tree roots deep in the soil?

No. Most tree roots are in the top 12 inches of soil and the most absorbing roots are in the top 6 inches. The soil surface is where the oxygen, water and nutrients are plentiful and thus where the roots are. For this reason, protecting tree roots during construction is very important. For every inch of trunk diameter at chest height, keep at least a 1-foot radius of undisturbed soil.

### Is it OK to top my trees?

No, no, no! Tree topping is one of the worst things you can do to a tree. It removes the food producers or leaves, causes decay, allows insects and disease to gain entry and usurps energy for sealing damaged tissue. Topping may quickly or slowly kill or damage trees. It's better to remove a tree than damage it.

### Can termites, carpenter ants or mushrooms kill my tree?

No. These are symptoms of decay, not the cause of it. Don't treat the symptoms. Have an ISA certified arborist assess the decay. Generally, if one-third or more of the roots, trunk or branches are decayed, the tree should be removed. Contact your county Cooperative Extension center for a list of ISA certified arborists. **John MacNair**



## Add Flowering Trees to Your Spring

Nothing is quite as grand as spring in North Carolina with all of the azaleas and rhododendrons in bloom. But why stop there! A wide range of flowering trees can be a part of the spring beauty. Redbuds, dogwoods and flowering cherry are standard fare. And don't

forget about the star magnolia, saucer magnolia and flowering crabapple! For a bit of unusual interest, try Japanese flowering apricot for early spring color or fringe tree and golden-chain tree for a mid-spring display.

**Carl Matyac**



## Limited Space? Plant a Container Garden!

Limited space need not keep you from the joys of gardening. Container gardens are a good option for residents of apartments, condominiums, retirement homes or houses on small lots. Containers are mobile, allowing a gardener to take the plants along or move them for an instant splash of color.

Enjoy your plants more fully by locating them on patios, balconies or window boxes. Container gardening, however, is not without its problems, especially in North Carolina. A plant growing in an exposed location is under more stress, dries out faster and needs a regular watering schedule. Consistent rains tend to leach the nutrients from the containers, requiring a regular fertilizing schedule.

Plants that grow well in containers are

wide-ranging, from the strictly ornamental to the edible. Growing edible crops in containers can be enjoyable and productive. Look for excellent bush varieties of tomatoes such as 'Quarter Century,' 'Bush Big Boy,' and 'Tornado.' Squash varieties to look for are 'Clarimore' and 'Sunburst.' Cucumbers such as 'Patio Pik' and 'Spacemaster' also can be grown in large containers. A bushel basket works well for tomatoes, and squash need at least a 2-gallon pot.

Herbs also work well in containers, and even dwarf fruit trees can be attractive and productive. Woody ornamentals combined with vines and seasonal annuals provide a stunning display. Even with limited space, containers provide lots of options! **Nancy Anderson**

## gardentalk

*"I love spring anywhere, but if I could choose I would always greet it in a garden."*

— Ruth Scout





## There are a bunch of small bees digging holes in my lawn. Are they dangerous?

**NO.** These bees do have stingers and a few people are allergic to bee venom. However, I have never known anybody to get stung by these bees. Bee species in the families Colletidae, Andrenidae, Halictidae, Anthophoridae and Megachilidae are called solitary bees. Why do we call them solitary when there are hundreds of bees in your yard? Solitary simply means they live one to a tunnel. I have walked through swarms of these little bees catching one after another in my bare

hands. Eventually, the homeowner agrees the bees were not likely to sting. They never catch any bees themselves, but that's all right. Our Extension entomology specialist says catching solitary bees by hand isn't smart, but he doesn't know anybody who has been stung either. In recent years I have seen more solitary bees. This may result from lower honeybee populations. Like honeybees, solitary bees pollinate flowers and shouldn't be destroyed.

*David Goforth*

## ENVIRO- TIP

### Slug Control in Home Gardens

Early spring always generates lots of calls concerning something eating small, tender plants overnight. A common culprit is the slug. Slugs may totally consume young plants or chew large, ragged holes in the foliage. Because they are largely nocturnal, catching them red-handed, so to speak, is sometimes difficult. As slugs glide across surfaces they leave a slime trail which appears silvery when dry. Many times this trail is the only daylight proof of the guilty party!

During the daylight, slugs hide beneath stones, boards, mulches and under dense groundcovers. There are several ways to control or manage slugs. Garter snakes, birds and frogs are common natural predators of slugs. Sanitation in and around the garden including eliminating hiding places such as rocks, boards and overly deep mulches can reduce populations.

Many mechanical and home remedy controls are available. Sinking shallow containers filled with stale

beer in and around the garden has proven an effective means of control. The slugs crawl into the liquid and either drown or become totally inebriated. To ensure their death and destruction, crush the trapped intruders the following morning.

Wood cinders, wood chips, sand or diatomaceous earth (crushed silica-type matter) used as borders around gardens or particular plants may provide an effective barrier against slug invasion. These seem to work by abrading and rupturing cells on the ventral organ or foot of the slug, resulting in a sensation probably not unlike walking on broken glass. Strips of copper used as a border create a mild electrical shock for slugs when they attempt to cross and are an effective deterrent. There are also chemical baits available labeled for use in ornamental plantings and in edible crops. For more information contact your local Cooperative Extension center.

*Royce Hardin*



Successful Gardener is the International Association of Business Communicators' 1999 Silver Quill Award Winner!



## Announcing Extension's Regional Successful Gardener Seminar Series

### Topics

#### Creating a Beautiful Lawn

Learn easy lawn care and maintenance tips from the pros.

#### The Grandeur of Trees

Learn how to select and care for trees, plants that add significantly to your property's value.

#### Landscapes Alive!

Learn spring gardening and landscaping basics, from plant selections to turf care.

#### Creating Color with Annuals and Perennials

Learn how to bring your yard alive with color.

### Dates and Locations

- ▶ **Saturday, April 8**
  - Agricultural Resources Center, Newton
  - Details: (828) 465-8240
- ▶ **Fri.-Sun. April 14-16**
  - Southern Ideal Home Show, State Fair Grounds, Raleigh
  - Details: (919) 560-0525

### Watch Almanac Gardener on UNC-TV Network Stations

12 noon on Saturdays  
2:30 p.m. on Sundays

Produced by the N.C. Cooperative Extension Service and UNC Television

### The Haywood Community College Campus Arboretum

originated in the 1970s when the Board of Trustees decided to preserve the beautiful natural setting surrounding their campus. The landscape architect had many wonderful natural features to work with such as distant vistas, woodlands and a stream. One of the features preserved was a large oak forest containing trees over 100 years old. College students use this as a living classroom to explore the intricacies of its ecosystem. In addition, the students manage the dwarf conifer collection, vegetable garden and fruit orchard. The rhododendron and woodland gardens are spectacular in the spring. Roses and assorted perennials also are showcased throughout the garden and folks particularly enjoy their visit to the mill house and pond. The garden is open to the public Monday through Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. and is a wonderful place for a visit. The garden is located on Frelander Drive in Clyde. Call (704) 627-2821.

Karen Neill

## Gardening in April

### Ornamentals

- Prune azaleas and other spring-flowering shrubs just after they finish blooming.
- Begin scouting for azalea lace bugs and treat as needed. Begin a regular spray program for roses, every 10 to 14 days, to control black spot, aphids, spider mites and other pests.
- Be sure danger of frost has passed in your area before setting out tender bedding plants.
- Apply pre-emergent herbicides to flower and shrub beds per label instructions to reduce summer annual weed problems.
- Instead of cutting off the foliage of your spring-flowering bulbs as they finish blooming, leave it in place to die back naturally.

### Edibles

- Harvest strawberries daily to reduce fruit rot.
- Begin a regular spray program, every 10 to 14 days, on fruit trees to control insect and disease pests.
  - Harden off vegetable transplants by leaving outside during the day for several days before planting in ground.
    - Be sure danger of frost has passed for your area before setting out tender vegetable seeds or transplants.

### Lawns

- Warm season grasses such as zoysia, bermuda and centipede may be planted now through early summer. These grasses are not adapted to the mountains.
- Fertilize bermuda and zoysia with 1/2 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet. A slow-release fertilizer is best.
- Do not sow or fertilize cool-season grasses such as fescue, Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass until fall.
- Begin scouting for summer annual weeds and treat as needed. Treat before flowering for successful control.

Paul McKenzie



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