



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

JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

Showy Spireas Update the Heirloom Classic

The old garden-variety Vanhoutte spirea must now take a bow to the compact, colorful Bumald spireas. Garden designers are getting the message out that contemporary landscapes are better served with showy foliage and myriad textures provided by interesting woody ornamentals. The Bumald spirea hybrids, a cross between *S. albiflora* and *S. japonica*, have demonstrated that they are here to stay in our Carolina landscapes. These dwarf species comprise numerous cultivars that can light up a garden with golden yellow, bronze or lime-green foliage and contrasting pinkish or multi-colored flowers. Mainstream selections such as 'Little Princess', 'Goldflame', 'Goldmound' and 'Limemound' can now be found at most piedmont area nurseries.

The dwarf spireas are as tough as their heirloom cousins, but they offer color in the summer when most shrubs are showing the summer doldrums. Most cultivars will grow to 3 to 4 feet high with similar spread and are virtually carefree. You will find that this deciduous shrub is right at home in a low border or used en masse. The colorful varieties can be placed to draw attention to an entrance or garden gate.

Container-grown plants are easy to transplant and are adapted to a wide range of soil types but avoid low, wet sites. Give them full sun in an open area and they will be delightful companions. Spireas have few pest problems and are considered drought tolerant when established. Keep plants low by pruning after they bloom. Creeping junipers are good companion plants.

The newest cultivars that can be used for botanical accents in the landscape include 'Neon Flash', with reddish purple new growth and vivid red clusters of flowers, and 'Golden Sunrise', with the brightest yellow foliage yet.

A stroll through the JC Raulston Arboretum (JCRA) in Raleigh will provide a firsthand look at many more selections. Learn more about the JCRA and its plants and programs at [www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum](http://www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum). **Toby Bost**



*Spirea x bumalda*  
**'Goldflame'**  
Robert E. Lyons ©

inside

2

Herbs for Landscape & Culinary Flair

3

Enviro-Tip

4

Garden Spot

This issue sponsored by



*Spirea 'Crispa'*  
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*Spirea 'Goldmound'*  
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*Spirea japonica*  
**'Little Princess'**  
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Chives



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Spicy Globe Basil



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Thyme



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Variegated Sage

## Plant Herbs for Landscape & Culinary Flair

Americans are learning to cook with a new attitude these days. The shift toward healthier lifestyles has brought about a new interest in an old method of cooking. Culinary herbs have been used for centuries to flavor everything from salads and fish to soups and stews. Because of the concern about high amounts of salt, fat and sugar in the foods we eat, herbs are being used in increasing amounts as a healthier way to flavor our meals.

Many herbs are easy to grow and some of the most used and familiar culinary herbs exist in the gardens of not only beginners but experienced gardeners as well. Herbs can be grown in containers, tucked in and around other plants or may star in a garden devoted just to them. They are quite versatile, both for the landscape and for culinary creations.

Some easy selections to start with are basil, chives, oregano, parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme. Although they may sound rather ordinary, their addition to many dishes makes a striking difference in the taste. The proper use of these easy-to-grow herbs can turn a plain meal into a gourmet experience.

Most culinary herbs grow best in a sunny, well-drained area where the soil is deep and loose. Choose a site that receives at least 6 hours of direct sun each day. Water should be plentiful but the soil should not be wet. Compensate for poor drainage with raised beds amended with compost. Apply balanced fertilizers sparingly to leafy, fast-growing herbs. Heavy applications of fertilizer, especially those containing large amounts of nitrogen, will decrease the concentration of essential oils in the lush green growth. Herbs rarely suffer severe disease or insect damage.

The flavor in herbs is usually best when picked during the leaf growing stage. When the plants start to flower, the leaves often get a bitter taste. Picking the leaves and stems is often the best way to keep the plants from blooming and it also keeps them actively growing.

Some herbs are perennials which means they will come back each year. Many herbs are winter hardy in all or parts of North Carolina and can be left in the garden. Some can be brought indoors to overwinter. Other herbs are annuals, meaning they die at the end of the season. Some herbs are biennials, which means they die after two years. Use caution when planting some perennial herbs as they can be quite aggressive and can quickly take over a garden. Grow aggressive herbs, such as mint, in a clay pot planted in the garden to keep the roots from spreading. When there are more herbs in the garden than can be used, continue to harvest on a regular basis to prevent the plant from going to seed.

Most herbs can be used either fresh or dried, and some can even be frozen for later use. When using fresh herbs, a general rule is to use three times more than the dried amount. Always pick herbs in the morning after the dew has dried. Cut the stems on a diagonal and stand them upright in a glass or jar of water, cover loosely with a plastic bag and store in the refrigerator. They will remain fresh for at least a week if the water is changed every day.

What herb goes with what food? This is a question that often stumps would-be herb users. Web sites and books match the best herb with the most appropriate food. Containers of dried herbs list foods that will benefit from a particular herb and many recipes include the proper herb and correct amount to use. It never hurts to experiment on your own. Try small amounts at first and gradually branch out as your confidence grows.

For a chart that matches up herbs and foods visit [www.culinaryherbguide.com](http://www.culinaryherbguide.com). Learn more about growing, harvesting, preserving and winterizing herbs at [www.ncstate-plants.net](http://www.ncstate-plants.net). Click on Consumer Hort leaflets. Three herb publications are available under the Vegetables section.

Donna Teasley

### Extension's *Successful Gardener* Learning Center

Get your gardening questions answered:

► **April 13 -15 (throughout show)**

Extension's *Successful Gardener* Learning Center, Southern Ideal Home Show, State Fairgrounds, Raleigh.

**April 14, 11 a.m., 1 p.m., 3 p.m.**

Ten people will be selected for a container gardening competition. All supplies will be provided.

A grand prize will be awarded and each participant wins a consolation prize.

► **April 21, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.**

Landscape Design Seminar with Julie Moir Messervy at the JC Raulston Arboretum.

Details/registration: (919) 513-7005; [www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum](http://www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum).

### Gardentalk



"The hardest thing to raise in my garden is my knees."

Anonymous

## Q&amp;A

## How do I manage moss?

Would you like to get rid of it or make it thrive?

Moss is a wonderful evergreen groundcover to some, and a nasty weed to others. The answer to either question is to provide the proper environment. In most situations moss depends on low fertility, acidic soil, high moisture, compaction, cool temperatures and shade. The absence or presence of all of these conditions is necessary for successful elimination or enhancement, respectively.

To eliminate moss, remove excessive moisture by grading or installing drain pipe, or both. Take a soil sample to evaluate soil pH and fertility levels. Adjust with lime and

fertilizer according to the requirements of your desired plant species. Provide at least 4 hours of direct sunlight by removing vegetation, low limbs or even entire trees. Alleviate compaction by plowing, tilling or deep aerification. Physical removal of moss or chemical applications alone are short-term solutions. If the previous steps are not taken, moss will return very quickly. To get moss growing in a place it has not previously grown can be just as challenging. Take a soil sample test, adjust soil pH to about 5.0 or lower (no higher than 6.0), and provide the conditions above that your anti-moss friends just eliminated.

*Mike Wilder*

## ENVIRO-TIP

## Recycle Newspapers in Your Garden

Where do all the newspapers go that are delivered or brought into households each day? Many are recycled and many end up in landfills. An inexpensive way to control weeds in your garden is to use leftover newspapers for mulch material. Newspaper mulch can provide adequate weed control, improve plant growth, improve fruit cleanliness, increase yields and help conserve soil moisture. We often don't think about the cooling benefits that mulches can provide. However, cooler soil temperatures may help certain crops grow better. One of the best reasons for using newspaper mulch is that it takes a recyclable material out of the waste stream, which could help extend the life of a landfill site and allow land to be put to better use.

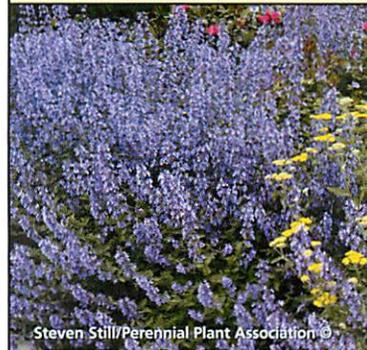
When using newspaper as mulch in the garden use several layers. Four to five sheets should be sufficient. Fill a wheelbarrow with water and moisten the thin pieces of newspaper to the point that they are soaking wet

and then lay them out over the area to be mulched. Place the sheets of newspaper down flat and at least two inches away from the stems of your plants. Avoid keeping the area near the stems too wet to prevent them from rotting.

Another method is to place the dry newspapers where you need them and then soak the newspaper-lined area with water from your hose. Add a layer of heavy grass clippings or other mulch materials on top of the newspapers to hold them in place. Avoid using garden soil for this purpose. Weed seeds may be in the soil and the mode of action for controlling weed seeds by using the newspaper mulch is to exclude sunlight necessary for the weeds to germinate.

The colored ink should not pose a problem. Most colored inks used in newsprint are soy based, not petroleum based, so they are safe to use. For more information about recycling, contact your county Cooperative Extension Center. *David Barkley*

## 2007 Winner



Steven Still/Perennial Plant Association ©

*Nepeta* 'Walker's Low' is the Perennial Plant Association's 2007 Perennial Plant of the Year. This catmint was introduced to European gardeners in 1988 and soon became a favorite of gardeners in the United States. It is a tough plant that is hardy in USDA zones 3 to 8.

'Walker's Low' was named for the garden in which it was discovered. The name is not an indication of the size of the plant, which grows 30 to 36 inches in height and spread. The flowers are blue-violet and will bloom continuously if properly pruned. 'Walker's Low' has very few insect and disease problems and works well in a low-maintenance perennial border. It grows best in full sun in well-drained soils but will tolerate some shade in hotter areas. Bees and butterflies are attracted to this catmint and it is resistant to rabbits and deer.

The plant's attractive grey-green leaves combine well with many plants in an herb garden and also in a perennial border. Thymes, sages, fox-gloves and heucheras are some of the plants that work well with this catmint.

*Mark Danieley*



Robert E. Lyons ©



### Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden is the

Carolinas' garden for all seasons and provides guests with a chance to reconnect with nature and pick up ideas for their own gardens. Located west of Charlotte on 380 acres on the banks of Lake Wylie, spectacular gardens, sparkling fountains, a visitors pavilion, gift shop and nature walk await visitors year-round. Nestled next to the beautiful grounds, the 8,000-square-foot Orchid Conservatory is under construction and will soon feature the world's finest orchids and tropical plants. HGTV named this one of the nation's "20 Great Gardens" and USA TODAY says the Garden is one of the nation's best places to "welcome fall with a flourish." Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden is a unique treasure and is well on its way to becoming a world-class horticultural destination. Visit [www.dsbg.org](http://www.dsbg.org) or call (704) 825-4490 for more information on admission, plants, classes and events at the garden, including the annual spring plant sale, April 21 and 22.

Mark Blevins

## Gardening in April

### Lawns

- Mow fescue at a height of 3 to 4 inches. Mow regularly to avoid stressing your lawn and to keep things looking fresh.
- Fertilize warm-season lawns like Bermuda or zoysia using the recommendations of your soil test. Avoid adding nitrogen to centipede grass.
- Check for grubs and apply pesticides as needed. Refer to Extension's Lawn Maintenance Calendar for more information about your grass species.

### Ornamentals

- Renew or add mulch to your planting areas. Mulch helps plants retain moisture, retards weed growth and builds soil. Bark and pine straw are readily available in most areas.
  - Many plants can be fertilized now. Slow-release fertilizer is recommended for optimum results.
  - Plant summer-flowering bulbs like gladiolus now. Mix in a little bulb food to feed your plantings. Add stakes or gro-rings to support the heavy blooms.

### Edibles

- Watch your calendar. Many North Carolina counties will reach their average last frost date in April. Before that date, plant only hardier vegetables like broccoli and cabbage. After the last frost plant tender vegetables.
  - Most vegetables are heavy feeders, so fertilize regularly with a slow-release fertilizer. Add lime as needed according to soil test recommendations. Add some extra lime to tomato plants. This provides calcium to prevent blossom-end rot.
  - Mulch in the vegetable garden helps retain moisture, reduces weeds and builds soil.
  - Beneficial insects can be your ally in the garden, so select pesticides with care. Some pesticides are as deadly to good bugs as they are to bad bugs. Bees are particularly susceptible to common pesticides.

Jeff Rieves



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