



Extension Gardener

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Empowering
gardeners.
Providing
garden
solutions.

in this issue

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Gorgeous Grasses for Garden Texture

Ornamental grasses are perfect additions to any planting. Their graceful, airy form and linear texture contrast with shrubs and perennials. In addition to being beautiful, most grasses are tough, drought-tolerant and deer-resistant, and have few insect or disease problems. Ornamental grasses are becoming more common in NC landscapes. Easy-to-grow varieties are available from most garden centers.

Like turf grasses, ornamental grasses can be divided into warm- and cool-season varieties, based on the season in which they actively grow. Gardeners in eastern North Carolina should stick with warm-season varieties, while those in the piedmont and mountains can grow both types.

Two of the most garden-worthy warm-season growers are native to the Southeast. The drought-tolerant pink muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) has masses of delicate, airy, vibrant pink flower panicles in fall. (See back page.) This clump-forming grass is hardy to Zone 6, grows to 3 feet tall and prefers well-drained sunny sites. For a different twist, seek out the variety 'White Cloud', which produces ivory-white flower panicles instead of the more common pink.

Another great native warm-season grower is switchgrass, aka panic grass (*Panicum virgatum*). It grows in most soils, including sand and clay, but needs full sun to perform best. Several varieties are available, all of which produce airy sprays

of buff-colored flowers and seedpods in late summer and fall. 'Cloud Nine' is a colossal, sturdy, upright variety that easily reaches 8 feet tall. 'Prairie Fire' is an excellent smaller selection, growing 3 to 4 feet tall, with lovely burgundy-splashed foliage. A personal favorite is 'Northwind', an extremely vertical, 5-foot-tall olive-green selection. Switchgrass varieties form slowly spreading clumps that can be divided every 3 to 4 years.

Other popular warm-season growers include fountain grass, *Pennisetum alopecuroides*. There are many varieties of this sun-loving summer-blooming grass, most of which grow to 3 feet or less. Maiden grass, *Miscanthus sinensis*, has long been a staple in the ornamental grass trade, but should be used with care as it has become invasive in western North Carolina.

Popular cool-season growers include blue fescue (*Festuca glauca*), a small clumping grass with intense blue foliage, and *Calamagrostis* 'Kark Foerster', which produces strongly upright spikes of pink blooms in summer that fade to tan in fall. Gardeners with wet soils should seek out the many varieties of ornamental sedges (*Carex* species) to add a grassy texture to pond edges and low areas. To find out more about these and many other ornamental grasses, visit the plant profiles on the NC Cooperative Extension Urban Horticulture website: www.ncstate-plants.net

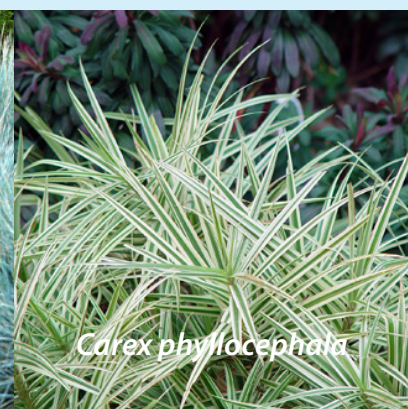
—Charlotte Glen



Pennisetum alopecuroides



Festuca glauca



Carex phylocephala

Upcoming Events

Sept. 1, 8, 15 (Consecutive Wednesdays)

Advanced Master Gardener Training

- Improve your troubleshooting and problem-solving skills as you apply Integrated Pest Management to landscapes and gardens. Open to Extension Master Gardeners. Call your county Extension center for class sites and details.

Sept. 11 (10 AM – 12 NOON)

Fall Lawn Care

Ace Hardware, 526 West Fleming Drive, Morganton

Sept. 15 (10 AM – 12 NOON)

Trees in Your Landscape

Buncombe County Extension Center, 94 Coxe Avenue, Asheville
• Joyce Plemmons, 828. 255.5522

Sept. 20 (1 – 5 PM)

Pesticide Exam

Burke County Extension Center, 130 Ammons Dr., Morganton
• 828.439.4460

Sept. 20 (4 – 5 PM)

Composting for Home Gardens

Henderson County Extension Center, 740 Glover St., Hendersonville
• Registration required.
828.697.4891

Sept. 17 (8:30 AM – 3:30 PM)

Landscaping Contractor Review Class

Henderson County Extension Center, 740 Glover St., Hendersonville
• Registration required.
828.697.4891

Smart Gardening — Fall garden cleanup

None of us likes to use pesticides if it can be avoided. As good gardeners, there are steps we can take to help avoid, or at least reduce, some pest problems.

One key to delaying the onset of some pest problems and reducing the spread of plant diseases is good sanitation. Remove diseased plants from the garden. Prune out diseased branches promptly. Keep an eye out for the first bean or squash beetles, and squish them before they lay eggs. Pull weeds before they go to seed.

The fall is an excellent time to practice good sanitation with some attention to thoroughly cleaning up garden areas. The fruit orchard is a good place to start. For example, rotten peaches



laying on the ground, or dried up “mummies” left hanging in the tree, are usually loaded with spores of brown rot fungus. If left in the orchard, they provide a repository for tons of spores to start infecting your peaches early next spring. If you do a good job of cleaning up all of the leaves and fruit in the orchard this fall, there will be fewer disease spores to start infections next year. Some mite and insect eggs also spend the winter attached to fallen leaves or fruit.

Landscape areas and vegetable gardens can also benefit from a good fall cleanup. Dead leaves under the rose bush may contain spores of black spot and powdery mildew. The same goes for anthracnose leaf spot on maples and sycamore, and many other fungal diseases. In the vegetable garden, chopping and plowing debris into the soil with a rototiller can also be an effective way to destroy overwintering diseases and insects.

Once you have debris collected, you have to decide how to dispose of it. Most plant debris can go into the compost pile. But materials known to be diseased or insect infested should be destroyed. Most of us do not maintain compost piles that really get hot enough to destroy pathogens. Diseased material can be burned or discarded in the trash. Some gardeners keep a separate compost pile, well-removed from the garden, that will not be used until thoroughly decomposed.

—Linda Blue

Food Production — Thornless blackberry care

Because thornless blackberries are a biennial plant, half of their vegetation has to be removed every year. This means pruning should be performed in the summer after the plant finishes fruiting. Thornless blackberries have two types of canes: primocanes and floricanes. The primocanes are actively growing vegetative shoots that are produced in the first year. The floricanes are the canes that bear fruit in the summer; these were last year’s primocanes.

After the plants have finished fruiting in early August, the spent floricanes (the ones that bore fruit) should be pruned out at ground level. The spent canes should be hauled off or mulched with a mower. By removing the spent floricanes, more room will be available for new primocanes to grow the following year. If you think your plants contain a disease or virus, it

is recommended that you sanitize your pruners (with a bleach/water mixture) before moving to the next plant in order to prevent the spread of the disease or virus.

Thornless blackberry care does not end with pruning. Watering should continue after fruiting is completed until the growing season ends. Primocanes should be fastened to the trellis so they are out of the way of next year’s growth. In addition to the spring fertilizer application, another fertilizer application should be applied at the time of summer pruning. This late fertilizer application helps the current primocanes to continue to grow lateral shoots, which will produce fruit the following year. These maintenance chores will ensure that you have a bountiful crop of blackberries each year.

—Daniel Shires

Garden Spot — Daniel Boone Native Gardens

The High Country of North Carolina offers many natural habitats to experience the biodiversity of native plants along the Blue Ridge Mountains.

A handsome collection of these native wildflowers, trees and shrubs can also be experienced at the Daniel Boone Native Gardens located just outside of Boone.

The Daniel Boone Native Gardens encompass 3 acres of native herbaceous and woody plants landscaped through diverse habitats of sun and shade, bogs, rocky boulders and rhododendron and fern gardens. There is also a historic log cabin that was once located on Grandfather Mountain for visitors to enjoy. Established by the Garden Club of North Carolina in 1966, the garden is open from May through October to the general public for a small entrance fee of \$2 a person.

Decorative wrought-iron gates, arbors, and



walkways nicely compliment the myriad of blooming plants that are found throughout the growing season. Specimens are labeled to allow for self-guided tours

of the garden, and community volunteers who assist with the upkeep of the garden are friendly and knowledgeable. Group tours can be provided, and the garden is also available for weddings and special events.

Contact the garden at dbgardens@danielboonegardens.org, or visit the garden's website for more information on these opportunities. The website also contains a helpful bloom calendar, so you'll know just what to expect when you visit the gardens: <http://danielboonegardens.org>

—Meghan Baker

Open gates at the Daniel Boone Native Gardens invite you to enjoy habitats of sun and shade filled with native perennials, shrubs and trees.

Photo ©Daniel Boone Native Gardens

Environmental Stewardship — Traditional vs. organic

As today's gardeners and farmers tend their crops, there are decisions that they must make regarding how they will feed their crops and how they will protect them from pests. As stewards of this earth, we should consider these choices.

Those who choose organics grow their crops without the use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. While this seems to be a noble choice on the part of the grower, it still has its problems. It costs more to grow organically. Increased labor goes into producing organic products because of all the hand labor needed. Natural pesticides and fertilizers are considerably more expensive. Some heirloom or open-pollinated seeds are pricey as well. Finding organic fertilizers (manures) that have not been tainted with herbicides from the hay that the animals eat is becoming increasingly difficult. Heirloom plants are sometimes more susceptible to insects and diseases. So, although

organic sounds wonderful on the outside looking in, it can be a difficult and costly way to make a living, with higher prices being passed on to consumers.

When conventional growing methods are used, synthetic pesticides and fertilizers are used. Most farmers and gardeners use pesticides only as a last resort, and they use them with care. Harvests from conventionally grown crops are larger and less costly. Expensive pesticides are used only when necessary. Hybrid seeds give us more disease and insect resistance, producing larger yields and lower prices.

There are choices to be made by all who grow crops and by those who purchase them, and there's room for different choices. The decisions should be made with the knowledge that we have the safest and most plentiful food supply in the world. Enjoy our bountiful harvest.

—Donna Teasley

Tips & Tasks

Lawn Care

- Seed tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass lawns in early September. Mulch seeded areas with wheat straw to protect seedlings from drying out.
- Fertilize and lime tall fescue and bluegrass lawns according to soil test results. This is the second feeding for the year.
- Do not fertilize warm-season grasses in the fall.
- Homeowners can apply an insecticide for grubs in the lawn in early September if not done in August.

Ornamentals

- Do NOT prune shrubs in September – early November! Pruning at the incorrect time will disrupt their internal process of preparing for winter dormancy.
- Now is the time to place spring bulb orders. Do not plant bulbs now; wait for the arrival of cooler weather in November.
- Fall is the perfect time for planting trees and shrubs. See Extension Gardener's handout on planting trees and shrubs: www.cals.ncsu.edu/extgardener/tree.pdf

Edibles

- Monitor fall vegetables for insects.
- Begin cleaning up vegetable plots so debris can decompose before next spring. Incorporate plant debris into the soil.
- Clean up garden sprayers and lawn equipment if not in use.
- As the vegetable garden finishes, add composted manure or mushroom compost to improve the soil.

—Diane Turner



Showstopper — Pink muhly grass

Pink muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) is an absolutely showstopping source of late-season color. As an ornamental grass, it is a great compliment to those landscape beds with fading summer annuals. The delicate plumes of flower panicles create a striking pink haze above the foliage. This perennial is attractive individually but really makes a big show when used in mass. Pink muhly grass can reach a height of 4 feet and a width of 3 feet. Give it plenty of sunshine, and transplant into soil that is well-drained.

A North American native, pink muhly grass sounds too good to be true. It's as reliable as promised. Long-lived with little to no insect or disease pests, this ornamental grass is perfect for the low-maintenance garden. It tolerates heat, humidity, drought and poor soil, and does best in Zones 6 to 9.

—John Vining

Sustainability

Preventing Garden Diseases

One important and overlooked gardening chore is cleaning up at the end of the growing season. The amount of cleanup done in the fall will directly affect the success of next year's crops. Every weed removed this fall means fewer weeds next spring. Get any old crops out of the garden space before winter sets in. Dead plants and leftover vegetables are perfect over-wintering places for diseases and insects. Slugs and bugs can spend the winter in plants and weeds, and disease organisms such as early and late blight can also survive the winter in discarded vegetables, stems and leaves. Place leftover plants that have had pest or disease problems in trash bags or burn them to prevent spread. Never put infested plants or perennial weeds in the compost pile.

—Donna Teasley

Incredible Edibles — Fruit trees

When you choose a landscape tree, you consider whether it is well-adapted to your local environment and if it will fit your space when mature. You might think about whether the tree has showy flowers and will attract beneficial honeybees to your landscape. Use the same criteria to choose a fruit tree.

Look first for fruit that grows well in your region. Not every part of the state can grow every fruit or every variety of a particular fruit. Check with your county agent for specific varieties best suited to your location. Choose full size, semi-dwarf or dwarf rootstocks, depending on how much space you have.

To have a healthy fruit harvest, you also may need some pest management skills and strategies. Choose tender fruit, such as peaches, only if you are ready and able to devote a good bit of time and energy to pest control.

—Anne Edwards

Pest Alert — Florida betony

Florida betony is an aggressive weed that is becoming more common across the state. Once introduced, it can spread rapidly and be difficult to control.

This perennial weed is most noticeable during late summer to early fall and in early spring. It typically remains green through the winter. Florida betony has square stems with leaves that are opposite and lance-shaped with toothed edges. The best way to identify it is to dig it up. The white, segmented tubers resemble a rattlesnake's rattle, hence the common name "rattlesnake weed." The tubers contribute to the weed's invasiveness and rapid spread.

When you see Florida betony emerge, repeat-

edly hoe or cut out the top growth to starve the weed's root system. For lawns, apply a selective herbicide labeled to control Florida betony in the fall to emerged Florida betony. Follow with a second application in midwinter or early spring. Suppress it in landscape beds or around trees and shrubs by applying a 2- to 3-inch layer of mulch. To provide an additional barrier, use a landscape fabric beneath the mulch layer. Controlling Florida betony requires persistence. It can take several years to get rid of Florida betony in heavily infested areas; repeated herbicide applications will be necessary for a few years.

—Della King



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Florida betony
(*Stachys floridana*)

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