



# Extension Gardener

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Empowering  
gardeners.  
Providing  
garden  
solutions.

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## Fragrant Shrubs for All Seasons

**E**vergreen plants provide fill and great background drops for interesting foliage and flower colors. Variegated foliage often brightens up dark areas of the garden. Nothing provides greater delight in the garden, however, than wonderful fragrance from flowers or foliage. Try to fit a few plants into your landscape that will brighten your day through fragrance.

Fragrance, according to *Webster's Dictionary*, is an agreeable sweet odor. No garden is complete without it. It is even better if you select plants to provide fragrance for each season of the year. Here are a few fragrant winners that are hardy throughout North Carolina. Use these or other fragrant plants to enhance your enjoyment of the garden.

Butterfly bush (*Buddleja davidii*) is a deciduous shrub available in slow- and fast-growing forms that reach up to 10 to 15 feet high and just as wide. Its deciduous leaves are often gray underneath. Lavender, white, yellow, purple and pink flowers grace the garden with their butterfly-attracting fragrance from June to September. Full sun and well-drained to moist soil provide the best growth.

Sweet shrub (*Calycanthus floridus*) is a traditional southern landscape plant that grows naturally from Virginia to Florida. This 6- to 9-foot-high by 6- to 12-foot-wide shrub is deciduous and grows best in partial shade and deep

moist soils. Its green leaves are often shiny with a quilted appearance due to vein patterns. Reddish-brown or maroon flowers with a fruity fragrance are prevalent in April and May. Purchase sweet shrub in flower to be sure it's fragrant.

Small anise-tree (*Illicium parviflorum*) is an evergreen shrub with olive-green leaves that are held upright on a plant that grows 8 to 12 feet high and just as wide. It is tolerant of sun or shade and moist or dry soil. The plant blooms in May and June with small yellow-green flowers hidden by the foliage. The flowers are not fragrant, but the leaves of this tough screening plant smell like licorice. Star-shaped fruit become noticeable in the fall.

Perhaps the toughest deciduous fragrant shrub is winter honeysuckle (*Lonicera fragrantissima*). The plant grows 10 to 15 feet high and as wide in sun to partial shade and moist to well-drained soil. Creamy-white lemon-scented flowers grace this shrub from January through March.

Tea olive (*Osmanthus heterophyllus*) is an evergreen shrub that looks like a holly and grows 12 to 15 feet high and 12 to 15 feet wide. Small white flowers have a long-distance fragrance that will get your nose's attention from across the yard during September to November. It grows best in light shade and moist, well-drained soil.

—Danny Lauderdale



## Upcoming Events

### March 2 – May 11

**Ashe and Watauga County Master Gardener training**

**Boone**

- Contact Meghan Baker, 828.264.3061.

### March 4 (6 – 8 PM)

**Organic Gardening Workshop**

*Burke Extension Center, Morganton*

- 828.439.4460

### March 11 (9 AM)

**Tree Fruit Production for the Small Grower**

*McDowell Extension Center, Marion*

- 828.652.8104

### March 13 (10 AM – 12 NOON)

**Lawn care for the Homeowner**

*Ace Hardware, Morganton*

- 828.439.4460

### March 13 (8:30 AM – 3 PM)

**High Country Seed Swap and Grower's School, Jefferson**

- 336.846.5850

### March 16 (6:30 – 9 PM)

**Plant growth and regulator meeting for apple growers**

*Henderson County*

- 828.697.4891

### March 30 – 31

**Developing a New Food Business (\$95, registration deadline March 16)**

*Buncombe County*

- 828.255.5522

### April 17 (10 AM – 12 NOON)

**Container Gardening Workshop**

*Ace Hardware, Morganton*

- 828.439.4460

### April 22 (6 – 8 PM)

**Controlling and Identifying Lawn Weeds,**

*Burke County Agricultural Building*

- 828.439.4460

### April 22 (1 – 3 PM)

**Sprayer Calibration Workshop**

*Henderson County*

- 828.697.4891

### May 22 (10 AM – 12 NOON)

**Controlling Diseases and Insects**

*Ace Hardware, Morganton*

- 828.439.4460

## Smart Gardening — Grasscycling

**Y**ard waste can account for 20% of the solid waste in local landfills, and up to 50% of all yard waste is grass clippings. Grass clippings are recyclable and do not need to take up valuable landfill space. To deal with the solid waste crisis in North Carolina, all of us will have to make major changes in the way we handle yard waste.

Using grass clippings as a source of fertilizer for your lawn can save time and money and help protect the environment. Leaving clippings on your lawn can generate up to 25% of the lawn's yearly fertilizer needs and reduce the amount of time and money you spend fertilizing and bagging. Lawns stay greener and healthier when clippings are left on them.

Any mower in good working condition that has a sharp blade can be used for grasscycling. Mulching mowers may be better than traditional mowers for those who cannot mow regularly. Mulching mowers cut grass into finer pieces, allowing clippings to filter down among the standing plants. With any mower, best results can be expected if the lawn is dry. Mowing

when the grass is dry allows better distribution of the clippings and less chance of clogging the mower.

If you can, mow your lawn regularly to 2.5 – 3 inches for tall fescue or bluegrass lawns. A basic rule is not to remove more than a third of the growth at one time. Occasionally, prolonged rains make it impossible to mow regularly. In these cases, raise the height of the mower for the initial cutting and gradually lower the mower to the recommended height. You can mow just once and recycle the longer clippings if the clumps of grass are spread evenly over the lawn to allow them to disintegrate. Or allow the clippings to dry for a day or two, then mow again to distribute them evenly. If you have not been able to mow for a while and the quantity is too great to leave on the lawn, clippings can be used as mulch on tree and shrub beds. Mowing frequency will vary with temperature, fertility, amount of moisture, season and the lawn's natural growth rate.

—Diane Turner

## Food Production — Western Carolina blackberries

**B**lackberries have grown wild in North Carolina for hundreds of years. They have also been grown commercially for many years on a small-scale basis. Within the last 4 to 5 years, commercial blackberry production has risen drastically, with acreage increasing from around 10 acres to approximately 300 acres in North Carolina. Most of the acreage occurs in Cleveland and Gaston counties, with some in Henderson county and upstate South Carolina.

Many factors have influenced the rise in production. One factor is increased awareness of the health benefits of blackberries. Another factor would be interest from major fruit buyers. The final contributing factor is the western N.C. climate and harvest window. The commercial blackberry picking season begins in Mexico and gradually moves north to Florida and Georgia, and then to upstate South Carolina and western North Carolina.



Sunny Ridge Farms from Winter Haven, Fla., buys the most of the blackberries grown in the mountains. Sunny Ridge remodeled an old apple-packing house in northern Cleveland County and made it into their N.C. office and distribution center. This facility houses large coolers used to store the blackberries in addition to new forced air coolers, which are used to remove any field heat from the fruit. All the fruit grown in the area is taken to this facility, where it is held in cold storage until orders are filled.

Blackberries from this center ship as far away as Canada on a daily basis throughout June, July and August. Western N.C. blackberry growers have many years experience in the fruit business. Most of them use blackberry production as a way to diversify their farming operations. The next time you go to the grocery store, look for fresh blackberries from N.C. farms. (Photo courtesy USDA-ARS)

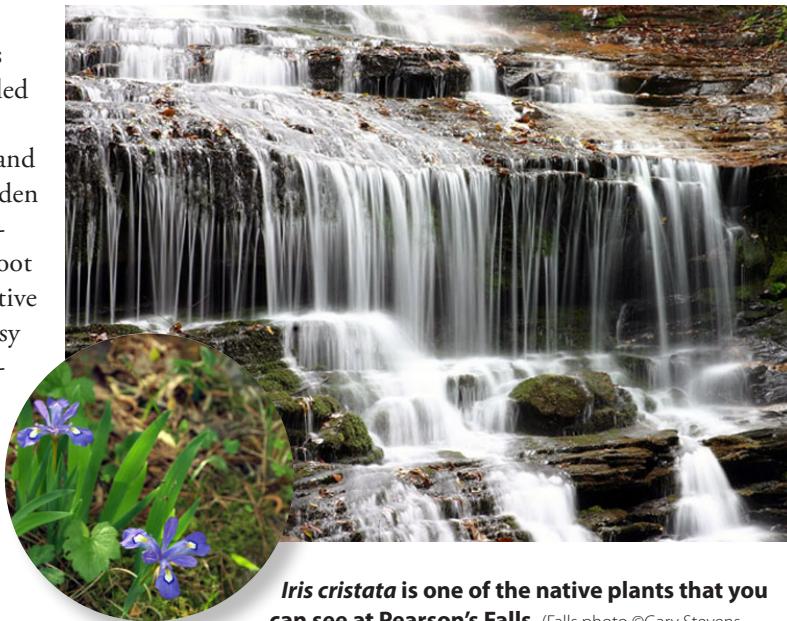
—Daniel Shires

## Regional News of the Mountains

### Garden Spot — Pearson's Falls

Nestled in the western end of Polk County is one of the prettiest unspoiled forests in North Carolina's mountain region. Owned and operated by the Tryon Garden Club, this 268-acre botanical preserve features a 90-foot waterfall plus dozens of native wildflowers. A relatively easy  $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile trail from the parking area allows for viewing hundreds of native plant species, including ferns, mosses and indigenous wildflowers, throughout the growing season. Open February through December, a small admission fee is used to help maintain the property.

The glen was purchased after the Civil War by Charles William Pearson, an engineer who discovered the falls while scouting for a railroad route from South Carolina to Asheville. In 1931, when Pearson's son proposed selling part of the land to a timber company, the Tryon Garden Club offered to buy it instead. Now the glen is a popular tourist attraction and an outdoor laboratory for colleges, universities and schools.



**Iris cristata** is one of the native plants that you can see at Pearson's Falls. (Falls photo ©Gary Stevens, <http://creativecommons.org>)

If you are interested in seeing Carolina wildflowers in their native habitat, then Pearson's Falls is a "must see" botanical glen. Bring the family and a picnic lunch for a peaceful and beautiful outdoor experience, located off U.S. Hwy 176 between the towns of Saluda and Tryon, N.C. For more info visit the Falls online: [www.pearsonsfalls.org](http://www.pearsonsfalls.org)

—John Vining

### Environmental Stewardship — Mulches

Do I mulch or not? This question is pondered every day by gardeners who don't know how much mulch to use, what style of mulch to use or whether to use organic or inorganic mulch.

The application of the right mulch can prevent weeds, protect roots, conserve water and make the landscape look neat and complete. But many gardeners get confused by the different kinds of mulch available. Which is best?

Pine bark nuggets, while dark and attractive, are light and tend to float away during heavy rain or high winds. Shredded pine bark, however, is dense and heavy and stays in place. Hardwood mulch comes in many different shades and can even come dyed to specific colors. It is up to the consumer to choose between shredded or chips.

Then there's the termite issue? Does mulch contain termites? It probably does, but just be-

cause termites are found in mulch doesn't mean they are headed for your house. Termites like moist conditions and are as likely to be found under gravel mulch as wood. The solution to this problem is to keep the mulch away from the foundation of the house. It is more important to keep the depth of the mulch at 2 – 4 inches and away from the base of trees where insects and animals can live and damage the plants.

Inorganic mulch does have a place in the landscape. Gravel, weed fabric and black plastic have long been used with good results. Rubberized mulch is a new product that was first used on playgrounds but has spilled over to the home landscape. Although it can hold water, prevent weeds and work well on paths and walkways, it will never become rich organic matter that enriches the soil.

—Donna Teasley

### Tips & Tasks

#### Lawns

- Take advantage of warm days to apply broadleaf weed killer to lawns.
- Mow tall fescue lawns to a  $2\frac{1}{2}$ -to 3-inch height. Mowing to the proper height will help control weeds.
- May is a great time to check your lawn for white grubs and treat with the appropriate insecticide.

#### Ornamentals

- After foliage has faded on naturalized spring-blooming bulbs, dig them up and divide any overcrowded clumps.
- Do not remove foliage from spring-blooming bulbs until the leaves have turned completely yellow and brown. Do not prune them beforehand.
- Apply a fresh layer of mulch on plant beds. The mulch layer should be no more than 3 – 4 inches deep. Mulch helps to retain moisture, prevent weeds and build the soil.
- If spring-flowering shrubs need to be pruned, do so within a month of blooms fading.
- Set out summer annual bedding plants after danger of frost has passed, usually in early May.

#### Edibles

- Warm-season vegetables, such as tomatoes and peppers, should be planted after all danger of frost has passed, usually in early May.
- When planting, remember to rotate locations of plant families every few years to reduce disease and insect pressure.

—Diane Turner



Plant Haven Inc.

## Sustainability

### Attracting Pollinators

Pollinators are important parts of a well-balanced garden ecosystem and essential to vegetable production. The best known pollinator is the European honeybee, but other animals—such as native bees, wasps, flies, hummingbirds, butterflies, moths and bats—also play a role in pollination. Help pollinators thrive by developing pesticide-free habitats. Provide a variety of plants with different colors and shapes that bloom at different times. Plant native plants to attract and conserve native pollinators. Incorporate different plant heights to provide protection against predators. A planting guide with specific recommendations can be downloaded from <http://www.pollinator.org>. Plant tender annual flowers right after the last frost in time to celebrate National Pollinator Week (June 21-27).

—Karen Blaedow

### Pest Alert — Gypsy moth

The gypsy moth (*Lymantria dispar*) is a pest of many hardwood tree species. This non-native insect was introduced to the U.S. in 1869. The N.C. Department of Agriculture has been conducting surveys statewide since 1982. Occasionally, local infestations are found, and the NCDA initiates treatment programs to eradicate populations before they spread. Currituck and parts of Dare County are quarantined for gypsy moths.

The destructive stage of the gypsy moth is the caterpillar, which can consume up to a square foot of leaves during its lifetime. Repeated defoliations can reduce plant vigor and eventually result in tree mortality. At maturity, caterpillars are 3 inches long and can easily be identified by the 5 pairs of blue dots followed by 6 pairs of red dots on their backs.

The vigorous reproduction of the gypsy moth contributes to population explosions and defoliation severity. After mating, each female moth lays several hundred eggs in a hairy, tan, oval-shaped mass about the size of a quarter. Egg masses are present from August through April and can be found attached to various surfaces, such as trees, buildings, cars and firewood. Female gypsy moths cannot fly, so this insect's spread depends on people. All firewood and other objects moving from infested areas should be checked for hitchhiking gypsy moths, caterpillars, and egg masses. Suspected gypsy moth infestations need to be reported to the NCDA's Plant Protection Division: <http://www.agr.state.nc.us/plantindustry/plant/entomology/GM.htm>

—Karen Blaedow

### Showstopper — 'Crown Jewel' gardenia

If you see a 'Crown Jewel' gardenia (*x Gardenia augusta*, patent no. 19896), you might just think you have died and gone to heaven. This new dwarf hybrid gardenia is compact, cold hardy and absolutely gorgeous. The product of a formal plant breeding project in Siler City, NC, 'Crown Jewel' combines the best traits from its parents: 'Kleim's Hardy' and 'Chuck Hayes'. It has the dwarf size and prolific flowering of 'Kleim's Hardy' along with the cold hardiness and double blooms of 'Chuck Hayes'.

'Crown Jewel' gardenia has attractive dark-green evergreen foliage on a plant that will grow to only 2 feet high and 5 feet wide. It has a mounding habit with white, intensely sweet, fragrant flowers in summer. Use 'Crown Jewel' as a low hedge, foundation plant or in a group planting in a sunny, well-drained area. It is suitable for planting in zones 7 – 10.

—John Vining

### Incredible Edibles

Home-grown asparagus is a delicacy. Growing asparagus is different from growing most vegetables because it is a perennial, meaning it comes back from the same roots every year. Many other vegetables are annuals that must be planted each year. To establish an asparagus patch, purchase dormant plants in late winter. 'Jersey' varieties are recommended. Plant asparagus in a well-drained soil in full sun. Mix in plenty of compost, and soil-test to see what nutrients to add. Plant asparagus crowns by digging a trench 6 – 8 inches deep. Space plants 18 inches apart, and cover with 2 inches of soil. As plants grow, add soil until the trench is completely filled. Do not harvest spears the first year. Light harvests can be made in the second and third years, and 6 to 8 weeks of harvest can begin in the fourth year and beyond. —Charlotte Glen



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Gypsy moth caterpillars impair tree health by eating foliage  
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