



Extension Gardener

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Winter 2011

Empowering gardeners. Providing garden solutions.

Nightlife: Plants That Shine after Dark

With the fall time change and winter setting in, gardeners have little time to enjoy their gardens during daylight. A night garden can enhance your gardening enjoyment with white flowers and fragrance.

A night garden incorporates white flowers, interesting foliage and fragrant plants that can be enjoyed during the daytime or after the sun sets. Although many night gardens are enjoyed in the summer, with a little planning you can get pleasure from a night garden year-round. Therefore, let's focus on plants for fall and winter interest.

Plan your night garden and place it in a location you will enjoy. Should your night garden be next to the backyard patio or in the front yard? Consider an area that will receive full moonlight away from mature trees or tall shrubs.

Choose plants for your night garden that have bright- and light-colored blooms. White, silvers and grays, as well as pastels, work well. Remember to plant for all the seasons. For the fall and winter months be sure to include 'Clear White Colossus' or 'Delta Premium Pure White' pansies or 'Sorbet White' or 'Penny White Blotch' violas, chrysanthemums, sasanqua and Japanese camellias. Lamb's ear, lavender, eucalyptus, artemisia and dusty miller will give season-long silvery-gray color to the garden, especially in eastern North Carolina. Silver-leafed succulents and sedum will also be attractive during winter. Include early

spring blooming bulbs, such as snowdrops, white daffodils and tulips, and light-colored hellebores (Lenten roses).

Ornamental grasses' flower plumes can catch the light in the fall. Great grasses to include would be stipa, pink or white muhly or noninvasive *Miscanthus* species.

Even vegetables such as white eggplant ('Alba', 'Albino', 'Casper'), white squash ('Turban', 'Sweet Dumpling', 'Delicata') and white pumpkins ('Baby Boo', 'Casper', 'Lumina') can add substantial color to the night garden.

Fragrance is also very important to the night garden. Fragrant osmanthus starts blooming and producing a sweet smell when the temperatures turn cooler. Other fragrant flowers and plants would include hyacinth, rosemary and silver thyme. Include any herb (such as silver sage) with white or cream-colored variegation for culinary use as well as fragrance.

Besides plants, night lighting or solar lights can showcase your night garden. Candles and lighted gazing balls can also add dimension to your garden. White marble or another luminescent material for your garden will add brightness and shine, so consider large stepping stones or statues. A small water feature with its soothing sound will create the perfect night garden atmosphere for you to enjoy all year long.

— Cyndi Lauderdale

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Camellia japonica



Osmanthus xburkwoodii



Tulipa sp.



Upcoming Events

2011 Master Gardener Volunteer courses are being held by Extension offices throughout the coastal area.

- Learn in-depth horticultural information to share with others. Contact your local Extension center: www.ces.ncsu.edu/ counties

Dec. 9 (10 AM) – Dec. 10 (2 PM)

Holiday Centerpieces Sale

Front Porch Café, Manteo
Belk Store, Kill Devil Hills

- Sponsored by Dare County Master Gardeners 252.473.4290

Dec. 20 — Age 5 - 8 (1 PM)

Dec. 21 — Age 9-12 (3 PM)

Christmas Workshops

Extension Auditorium,
407 Martha Street, Columbia

- \$5 per child includes all craft materials and a snack. 252.796.1581

Jan. 13 (6 PM) – Mar. 27 (8 PM)

Beginning Beekeeping

Wayne Community College,
Goldsboro

- Thursday evening course for anyone interested in beekeeping as a hobby or business. Includes a field lab. \$65 fee. 919.739-6931

The 2011 Wilson Garden Tour

is coming! Save May 6 and 7, 2011, for another amazing tour of local gardens

Smart Gardening — Permaculture

Permaculture can be thought of as an effort to create a yard that functions as a natural ecosystem, interactive and with little waste – an attempt to design with the thought of a “dynamic whole” rather than disassociated parts. It has been called a “science of applied ecological design.” Put simply, it could mean incorporating foods into your landscape, adding some composting for your organic scraps, harvesting and storing rainwater, catching the sun, blocking excessive winds, and doing it all in a way that is aesthetically pleasing and with a natural, efficient flow.

Adding vegetables, fruit, honey and eggs to the yard takes the most obvious step towards a more ecological design. Recognize that there is a fruit tree that is adapted to your environment and can fit into your landscape where a medium-sized ornamental tree would grow. Take care to choose a type that is well-adapted to your area and a variety that’s hardy. Avoid wet areas, and find out what type and how intensive your pest management will need to be. You may be able to grow fruit that is not reasonable as a commercial crop in our region but is well suited for an intensive home landscape. Consider un-

usual fruits such as Oriental persimmons: they do well here and have few pests. Find a spot for a vegetable garden, or mix vegetables into your sunnier ornamental beds. In most coastal counties you can grow vegetables almost year-round, with fall being most productive!

Enhance your soil with significant organic matter. Soils high in organic matter store water and nutrients for your plants, drain well and encourage a healthy mix of microorganisms. Use your own compost whenever possible to enhance the soil, not only because it is superior, but because it means you are recycling.

Finally, put a rain collection system near your garden where it will be used, and plant herbs and vegetables near the house where you can monitor and pick them easily. Incorporate the design principals of texture, form and color, but always focus on function, interaction with other parts of your yard and limiting waste. For more information on home permaculture, consider the book *Gaia’s Garden* (by Toby Hemenway) or the “Permaculture” distance education course offered by NC State’s Horticulture Department.

— Anne Edwards

Food Production — Starting transplants

Want to grow hard-to-find varieties or need several plants of one type? Be economical, and start your own transplants. Transplants can be started easily from seed in a cold frame, greenhouse or indoors. The most important requirement is adequate light. Seedlings need 12 to 16 hours of light a day. Forty-watt fluorescent fixtures with one cool-white and one warm-white tube, placed 2 to 4 inches above seedlings, make an adequate setup.

Most transplants are started 4 to 6 weeks before their planting-out date. Refer to the seed packet for information about planting depth. Count back from the date you wish to set out the plants. That’s when to start your transplants. Transplants can be grown in any type of container as long as it has bottom drainage and contains sterile seed-starting soil. In each container, plant two to three seeds at the proper depth and water as needed to keep soil moist. Sowing seeds in biodegradable pots means there are no plastic

pots to store or throw away. To prevent root restriction from a biodegradable pot after planting out, some folks tear the pot away before setting out the transplant. The “pot” can be left in the garden or put in the compost pile to decompose.

After seeds are planted, cover containers with a plastic dome or bag to increase humidity for germination. Remove the covering after the first leaves emerge. When seedlings have two sets of leaves, thin to one plant per container. To prevent root damage, thin by cutting rather than pulling. Begin fertilizing with a liquid starter fertilizer. After about 6 weeks your transplants should be well-rooted and ready to transition outdoors. A week before planting out, harden off plants by gradually exposing them to direct sunlight. Start in an outdoor shady spot, and increase sun exposure each day. When the transplants are hardened off, it is time to plant them in your garden.

— Karen Blaedow

Garden Spot — Growing near you!

Where better to learn about gardening than in a garden? Extension agents across North Carolina are developing demonstration and teaching gardens to teach gardening to home owners, Master Gardeners, youth and anyone else who is interested! Some gardens are designed to show various principles and practices – like rain gardens for stormwater management, drought-tolerant plants for water conservation, native plants for wildlife, or home food production – while other gardens provide opportunities for you to get involved hands-on through practical classes or volunteering.

In the coastal plain, make plans to visit Extension gardens such as the New Hanover Arboretum in Wilmington, the Wilson Botanical Gardens, Pitt County Arboretum, Outer Banks Arboretum and Teaching Gardens in Dare County, Nash County Arboretum, the Butterfly Pathway at the Core Sound Museum



Extension gardens across the coastal region feature theme gardens, native plants and unique garden projects.

on Harkers Island, or the Rain Garden at the Pine Knoll Shores Aquarium. Contact your local Extension center to see if a gardening project is underway in your county, and find out how you can get involved! Seek classes to learn about gardening by visiting the NC Cooperative Extension website and clicking on the Events link: <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu>

— Charlotte Glen

Environmental Stewardship — Christmas tree recycling

It is the Season to be jolly: it is a time of fellowship and thanksgiving, and a time to do something good with that leftover Christmas tree once the holiday passes. But what do you do with that 20-foot Fraser fir that has been blocking the entrance to your living room?

Many counties and cities have holiday tree pickup days when sanitation personnel will either pick those trees up curbside or provide collection points for your convenience. You should check with your local provider to find out what qualifications need to be met to ensure a successful pickup. To make things easier and a little cleaner, tree bags (available at local hardware stores) can be placed under the tree during installation. When you're ready to chunk that old tree, just pull the bag up over it and wrestle it to the curb.

As an alternative, some parks and local environmental groups collect Christmas trees for

various environmental uses. This may include using trees to help protect stream or lake banks from erosion until hardy plants planted on the shoreline can take root or to catch and hold sand on a beach. Sunken trees can also be used to create fish habitat in lakes or ponds – places where smaller fish can hide from predators.

Recycled trees can be chipped to create valuable mulch or composted to create a beneficial organic soil amendment, either of which may then be made available to local citizens. If you are an avid bird-watcher, you may want to create a backyard bird feeder out of that leftover tree. Simply place your tree in a desirable location (stay away from neighbors' windows), string pieces of fruit or that leftover popcorn garland on the tree and enjoy the feeding frenzy. Good luck and Happy Holidays.

— Daniel Simpson

Tips & Tasks

Winter Chores

The days are starting to get shorter and the temperatures are getting cooler. This means one thing: winter is on its way!

- Late fall is a good time to plant landscape trees and shrubs and divide perennials. Planting now allows plants to acclimate before they push new growth in spring. Watering is essential, especially during dry spells, because it helps reduce winter damage.
- Keep falling leaves off your lawn to prevent diseases and suffocation, and remove all dead plants and diseased foliage. Put off heavy pruning until late February to early March to prevent tender growth that will be prone to cold injury late this winter.
- When cutting back dead or diseased foliage and removing dead plants, do not leave the debris in the garden. Diseases and insects can overwinter and cause problems next spring. Throw out or burn diseased debris and get it away from the property.
- Mulch plays an important role in winter. It reduces weeds, insulates roots and protects roots from injury. A layer of mulch 2 to 4 inches thick is optimal.
- Other than winter-growing vegetables, resist the urge to fertilize. Fertilizing plants now would cause them to put on new growth, which would not have time to harden off before temperatures dip.

—Susan Brown



Showstopper — 'Winter Sun' mahonia

Mahonia 'Winter Sun' is a statuesque, evergreen shrub that makes an interesting focal point for winter gardens in zones 7 to 9. In December, 'Winter Sun' lights up any garden with its bright yellow flower spikes perched above its coarse-textured, almost holly-looking foliage. Chosen as an improved selection in Ireland in 1966, this mahonia hybrid is a relative newcomer to the Carolinas. It has a compact growth habit with more fragrant flowers than the common leatherleaf mahonia. Even with its compact growth habit, 'Winter Sun' will reach a height of 10 feet if left unpruned. Keep it under control by snipping the tallest shoots at ground level. Set out this mahonia in partial shade. Additional water is essential during prolonged summer droughts. As an added benefit, the plant produces grape-like clusters of blue berries in late spring that songbirds love to eat.

— John Vining

Sustainability

Evaluating Home Remedies

A homeowner using a home remedy for fleas wound up paying to haul the top layer of soil in his entire lawn to a hazardous waste facility. Can this be avoided? Before applying a homemade remedy, ask three questions. Is it effective, economical and environmentally sound? It doesn't matter how folksy a product sounds; using a product that doesn't work makes no sense. If a product does work, you should evaluate the cost. Sometimes the folk remedy has to be applied more than once to match the effectiveness of one pesticide application. Be sure to count all the applications in your cost. Finally ask yourself if it is environmentally sound. Registered pesticides have had dozens of tests costing millions of dollars to determine their effect on the environment and other organisms. The same tests are often *not* run on home remedies.

— David Goforth

Edibles — Community gardens

Community gardening has occurred for centuries. Look at the "War Gardens" of 1917-1919, the "Relief Gardens" of the '30s or the "Victory Gardens" of the '40s. Lately there seems to be a surge in community garden popularity. Changes in the economy, marketing, distribution and a shift to urban living have contributed to a rise in food insecurity. Community gardens improve our quality of life. They stimulate interaction, encourage self-reliance, produce food, reduce food costs and create opportunities for recreation, exercise and education. A garden can be a forum where all ages and cultures can exchange knowledge and food with others. To learn more about starting a community garden contact your local Cooperative Extension center.

Also check out the North Carolina community gardens website:
<http://nccommunitygarden.ncsu.edu/index.html> — Karen Neill

Pest Alert — Cercospora leaf spot

One of the most widespread diseases of the fall garden and landscape in North Carolina is cercospora leaf spot. Unlike many diseases that are host-specific, cercospora affects many different plants, including vegetables, lawns, shrubs and field crops in North Carolina. It is often most apparent on fall plantings of turnip, mustard, collards and other leafy greens. The primary cause is the fungus *Cercospora* sp., which is dispersed by rain, irrigation water and wind. Germination of the fungal spores occurs during wet, humid conditions, usually during late spring and summer. Growth is encouraged into the fall and winter growing seasons by frequently damp leaves. Cercospora begins as small, pale-green to

gray or white lesions that often have a brown or purple border. In the later stages of the disease, leaves may become a brownish-gray as they dry out and die completely. Plants can be defoliated when infections are severe. Controlling cercospora after it appears can be difficult without using expensive fungicide treatments. One way to prevent the disease is *not* to plant leafy greens for at least 3 years on the same spot. Once the growing season ends, destroy the remaining plants through tillage. Till the garden twice, at least 10 days apart, to ensure removal of plants that can be hosts for over-wintering spores. For more information, contact your county Extension center. — Will Strader



Cercospora leaf spot

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