



Extension Gardener

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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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 x burkwoodii



Tulipa sp.



Upcoming Events

Dec. 1 (4 – 6 PM)

Wreath Making Workshop

Bullington Center, Hendersonville

- Learn how to make your own natural greenery wreath from Mary Martin. All the materials supplied. Registration required. 828.698.6104

Dec. 10 (1 – 4 PM)

Holiday Open House

Bullington Center, Hendersonville

- Join us for treats provided by Forrest Women's Club and a chance to learn more about the Bullington Center. Amaryllis will be on sale. 828.698.6104

Dec 1. – Dec. 24 (8 AM – 5 PM)

WNC Farmers Market

570 Brevard Rd, Asheville

- Find the area's largest selection of locally grown Christmas trees, wreaths and holiday decorations.

Smart Gardening — Saving seed

Have you saved a seed today? This ritual has been practiced almost since time began and can be done by today's modern gardeners with a minimum of time and trouble. The practice of seed saving is simply the act of taking seeds from the best of the open-pollinated plants in the garden and storing them for next year's planting. For example, if you grow a watermelon that is particularly hardy or exceptionally sweet tasting or reaches maturity at an earlier time than normal, the seeds from that melon might be worth saving and planting the next season.

By 1900, the food that was grown for our planet was represented in 1,500 different plants. Each of these plants had thousands of different cultivated varieties. Today, 90 percent of the world's food is grown by 30 different plants; only 4 plants (wheat, corn, rice and soybeans) provide 75 percent of the food eaten on this planet. Diversity in our food supply is crucial to its sustainability. Diseases and insects can attack and destroy specific varieties of plants. In the early 1800s, the potato famine struck Ireland, killing the entire potato crop. Only one variety

of potato was grown in Ireland. If many varieties had been growing, not all of them would have succumbed to the fungus that ravaged the crop.

For the beginning seed saver, the most success comes from saving seeds of self-pollinating plants such as beans, tomatoes, peppers and peas. They produce seeds in the same season as they are planted. The danger of cross-pollination is slight, but be sure and leave ample space between different varieties.

Seeds should be stored in an airtight jar or in a plastic bag inside a sealed jar. Label and date all seeds and place in a cool, dark area. The process of seed saving is different for individual plants, but none of them is difficult for a beginning gardener. Be sure and save the best of your harvest to insure the best plants for next year. Use only open-pollinated seeds. Many catalogs offer open-pollinated seeds, and there are seed banks that have seeds available for purchase. For more details on how to save seeds, go to the website of The International Seed Saving Institute: www.seedsave.org

— Donna Teasley

Food Production — 10% Campaign

The 10% Campaign is an effort to encourage North Carolina consumers to spend 10 percent of their food dollars on foods from local sources. Through the campaign website, www.nc10percent.com, consumers and businesses pledge to spend 10 percent of their food dollars locally by purchasing products from area farmers and food producers. Campaign participants receive weekly e-mail reminders to report how much money they spent on local food. The website will show consumers how dollars spent on local foods grow.

North Carolinians spend about **\$35 billion a year on food**. If each person spent just 10 percent on food locally – roughly **\$1.05 per day** – then approximately \$3.5 billion would be available in the state's economy. Cooperative Extension's local foods coordinators will help connect consumers and food producers and support local businesses and organizations who want to spend 10 percent of their food dollars locally. Local food coordinators will personally contact businesses and organizations that register through the website to help them develop a



plan for purchasing local products.

In addition, the 10% Campaign website provides a "Find Local Foods" page with links to help consumers find

local food and farm products in their own communities. A "Learn More" page includes links to information on a variety of partner organizations, such as Slow Food USA and Eat Smart, Move More NC.

To find out what's happening with local foods in your county, visit your local Cooperative Extension office website: www.ces.ncsu.edu. A link to the Local Foods page can be found in the left column of your county center's home page. Help us build North Carolina's local food economy by joining the campaign and encouraging your family, friends and neighbors to do the same.

Funding for the 10% Campaign and website is provided by Golden LEAF.

— Sue Colucci

Garden Spot — Chimney Rock Park

Regardless of the season, Chimney Rock Park located within the Hickory Nut Gorge area in Rutherford County offers a glimpse of a diverse plant ecosystem. More than 550 species of vascular plants — including 32 ferns and fern allies — have been identified.

In the winter months, dense stands of evergreens and thickets of rhododendron and mountain laurel continue to provide a lushness of growth. The mix of topography, rocks, soils, moisture availability and sunlight exposure have created several unique plant habitats. Near the 404-foot Hickory Nut Falls, the cool, moist microclimate offers plants that would normally be seen in the southern Appalachians above 5,000 feet, such as the tundra plant deerhair bulrush. Directly below the cliffs, a “thermal belt” effect allows early displays of annual spring wildflowers such as trillium, toothwort and purple phacelia. Along the roadsides to the entrance of the meadows, wildflowers of moderately moist forests, such as bloodroot, foam flower and yellow mandarin can be found.

Authorized as a new North Carolina State Park in 2005, the Chimney Rock Park now encompasses roughly 4,000 acres that will protect the area’s natural heritage and offer outdoor



Chimney Rock Park hiking trails feature geological formations and native plants.

recreation options. The park features five unique hiking trails that combine rare and indigenous plants, unusual geological formations and a variety of native wildlife. Most trails are open all year, weather permitting; www.chimneyrockpark.com

— Jan McGuinn

Environmental Stewardship — Cherokee’s agricultural legacy

The Cherokee are the original farmers of the southern Appalachians. Since ancient times, the Cherokee have developed vegetable varieties suited to the mountains. Corn has been cultivated for at least 700 years, beans at least 1,200 years and squash for over 3,000 years. Now Cherokee traditional agriculture is in danger. Today’s lifestyle leaves little time for farming or gardening. Development, invasive plants, pollution and climate change also are taking a toll on Cherokee agriculture.

In 2005, Tsa La Gi Master Gardener Kevin Welch recognized the loss of many food crops of his childhood. Cherokee flour corn, tender October beans and candy roaster squashes were hard to find. He began to research the feasibility of starting a seed bank to save culturally important crops. The project has evolved into the Center for Cherokee Plants, a tribal nursery and seed bank. The Center also grows plants important to Cherokee artists: river cane, white oak and bloodroot. Tribal environmental programs need

wildlife and erosion-control plants, including sycamore, elderberry and sourwood. The seed-bank has expanded to include a seed-share program for berries, heirloom apples, nuts and wild greens. A memory bank effort has also begun to save the tribal elders’ traditional knowledge.

Cherokee’s agricultural legacy is regaining ground as the Center for Cherokee Plants addresses the tribal demand for culturally important seeds and plants, teaches traditional gardening methods and begins youth gardening efforts. The Center is part of a cultural renaissance reclaiming Cherokee values. In Kevin’s words, “We are bringing culture back to Cherokee agriculture!”

The Center can provide plant materials to enrolled members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Gardeners who are not enrolled may obtain Cherokee heirloom seeds from Tsa La Gi Master Gardeners Harold and Nancy Long, 828.497.6629, longnan1035@yahoo.com.

— Sarah McClellan-Welch and Kevin Welch

Tips & Tasks

Winter Chores

Even though it’s cold outside, there are still quite a few things that can be done in the landscape and the garden:

- The most obvious task in home lawns this time of year is removing leaves. Everyone has a different opinion about leaf disposal. Don’t burn them; that pollutes the air. Don’t bag them or sweep them to the curb; that fills up the landfill. Mulch them. When you mulch leaves, you return valuable nutrients and organic matter to the soil. These added nutrients will make grass and trees healthier.
- December is also a good time to test soil in lawns and gardens to determine how much lime to apply. Hardwood cuttings of landscape plants, such as forsythia (yellow bells), flowering quince, weigela, holly and hydrangea, can be taken this month.
- Protect strawberries by applying wheat or pine straw.
- Prune berry-producing plants such as hollies and use the cuttings in holiday decorations.
- December is a good time to plant trees and shrubs. Remember not to plant them too deep. Apply 3 to 4 inches of mulch and water well! A note of caution: trees and shrubs don’t need any fertilizer during December as that could encourage undesirable growth.

—Daniel Shires



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

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Cercospora leaf spot
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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