



# Extension Gardener

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Empowering gardeners. Providing garden solutions.

## Pruning Your Assets

**O**ur grand magnolias and glorious dogwoods provide a very small sampling of the South's rich natural capital. As with any asset, careful management helps to improve overall health and returns to the investor. Proper pruning is one critical component of landscape management that pays dividends.

February is often mentioned as one of the best months to prune woody plants. While this is often accurate, pruning places stress upon a plant regardless of the time of year. Carefully considering the motives for pruning will help to reduce unnecessary plant stress.

Plants are pruned for five primary reasons: to remove dead, diseased or damaged tissue; to maintain a suitable size; to accentuate aesthetic value; to improve health; or to encourage flowering. The motivation for pruning should not outweigh any other aspect of plant health or value. For example, if pruning a tree to improve driveway access compromises the tree's health, it may be best to remove the tree and replace it with one more suitable for the site.

Once you have clarified why pruning is necessary, identify the plant species that you are working with and research its growth and flowering characteristics. Protecting the next season's flowers is often a priority. If this goal tops your list, determine when the plant flowers. If the plant flowers in the spring, avoid pruning

it until flowering has ended. If the plant flowers in the summer or fall, late-winter pruning is acceptable.

Improving plant health is sometimes a significant concern. In this case, identify the plant's general category: deciduous (loses leaves in the winter), narrow-leaved evergreen (needle- or scale-like foliage) or broad-leaved evergreen (all remaining foliage types). Each of these groups can have very different pruning requirements.

Deciduous plants and broad-leaved evergreens are best pruned in spring before the new foliage emerges. Pruning narrow-leaved evergreens requires knowledge about plant growth. For example, loblolly pines have a whorled branching pattern that can be pruned to only an active lateral branch or pinched during spring's new "candle" growth. Other narrow-leaved evergreens, including junipers, arborvitae, cedars and false cypress, are less picky about the timing but can be damaged or disfigured by heavy pruning.

Proper plant management requires good understanding of why you want to prune and how the plant will respond. Call your Cooperative Extension center for assistance, or see this publication for more information: [www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/agpubs/ag-071.pdf](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/agpubs/ag-071.pdf)

— Bob Filbrun

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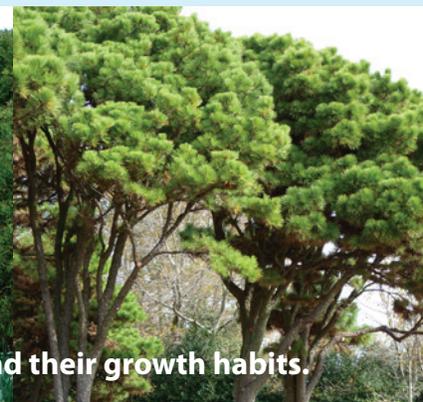
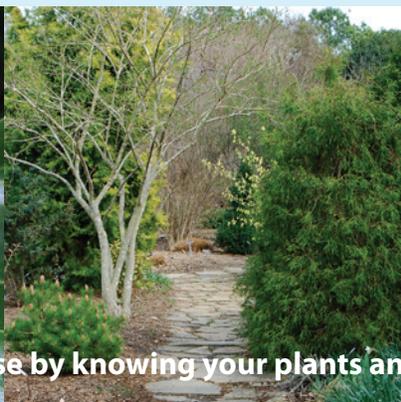
#### STATE NEWS

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Prune with a purpose by knowing your plants and their growth habits.



## Upcoming Events

**December 13** (10:00 AM – NOON)

### Holiday Cooking Smart with Diabetes

94 Coxe Avenue, Asheville

Debbie Sparks, (828) 255.5522

**December 17** (8:30 AM – 1:00 PM)

### Holiday Craft Bazaar

120 Hospital Ave NE, Suite 1, Lenoir

4-H Office, (828) 757.1257

**January 18 – April 25** (9:00 AM – NOON)

### Master Gardener Class

130 Ammons Drive, Suite 2, Morganton

Extension Office, (828) 439.4460

Applications must be received by December 16.

**January 30 – March 19**

### Eat Smart, Move More, Weigh Less

589 Raccoon Road, Suite 118, Waynesville

Jean Burton, (828) 456.3575

**January 28, 2012** (1:00 – 3:30 PM)

### Growing Mushrooms

McDowell County Extension Center, Marion

Molly Sandfoss, (828) 652.8104

## Smart Gardening — On the cutting edge

Often the phrase “on the cutting edge” is used to illustrate that we are staying on top of an issue and looking ahead. In the landscape, “on the cutting edge” should be our guide when it comes to pruning: Stay on top of how your plants are growing, and look ahead to use pruning to each plant’s benefit.

We prune for six main reasons: to improve a plant’s appearance or health, to control the plant’s size, to prevent personal injury or property damage, to train young plants, to influence fruiting and flowering, and to rejuvenate old trees and shrubs. Removing diseased, damaged or dead portions of shrubs and trees helps to speed up the development of callus tissue and can assist in limiting the spread of disease.

We can do our part to limit having to repeatedly and heavily prune a plant by learning what its mature height and width will be before planting it. Select a location that the plant will fit properly when fully developed. For well-traveled walkways, pruning shrubs back from interfering with people passing will help to eliminate injuries to people and plants. Removal of low limbs can also make areas safe when mowing.

For young plants and trees, pruning can be used to create the proper scaffold branches that form the main structure of the canopy. Pruning ensures that plants will develop the best framework of branches as they grow and mature. Pruning stimulates new growth and in turn assists in the development of flower buds. Lastly, pruning is sometimes necessary to get a tree or shrub jump-started into growing again, especially if the plant lacks vigor or has been abandoned.

Knowing why we need to prune also helps us determine when to prune based on the plant’s growth habits. During the winter months, we focus on dormant pruning for fruit trees (apple, pear, plum, peach, nectarine), summer-flowering shrubs (crape myrtle, rose of Sharon, butterfly bush) and ornamental grasses (liriope, mondo grass, pampas grass). Pruning at the end of winter just prior to bud break helps plants escape winter injury and promotes new growth as soon as the environment is favorable. Always keep pruning equipment sharpened and disinfected for the best pruning results.

—Jan McGuinn

## Food Production — Pecans in the home garden

Pecans are prized trees here in the South because of the shade and delicious nuts they provide. Most pecan trees have little, if any, trouble providing shade. They do, however, have trouble bearing fruit each year.

Most pecan trees have good years and bad. This has intrigued me and others for years. Researchers in many states have tried to figure this out. Quite frankly, the only answer that makes sense is the weather. In some years, the weather prevents the trees from being pollinated due to freeze damage or wind and rain storms. Any of these weather events can knock the flowers and pollen off trees.

Pecan trees are also susceptible to diseases and insects. Pecan scab fungus is the most common disease. An early season infection can significantly reduce yield and crop quality. It is impractical for homeowners to use fungicides against pecan scab, so you have to tolerate

the yield reduction in existing trees. Choose scab-resistant varieties when planting new pecan trees.

The most common and destructive pecan insect is the pecan weevil. Pecan weevils cause two types of damage. The adult weevils feed on immature nuts, causing many to fall to the ground. And the female weevils bore holes into the nuts and deposit eggs.

To control pecan weevils, you must use two control methods. One is sanitation. Each year when the pecans fall to the ground, sweep up all the nuts from the orchard floor and dispose of them. This will prevent the larvae from crawling out and burrowing into the ground to start another life cycle. Insecticide applications to the ground and tree trunks are necessary during August and September when the adult weevils are crawling out of the ground.

—Daniel Shires

## Garden Spot — Lake James State Park

Nestled on the shoreline of Lake James is one of the newest parks in our state: the Lake James State Park. Established in 1987, its vast acreage offers a variety of outdoor activities, such as hiking, camping, fishing and boating. Wildflower enthusiasts will enjoy walking the trails bordered by an abundance of native plants, including yellow lady-slipper orchids, Indian pipes, flame azaleas and more. Wildlife is also plentiful, with waterbirds, deer, foxes and mink, just to name a few, making the park their home. Steep pine, hardwood and hemlock ridges make up the topography of the park, and the lake's clear waters make Lake James State Park a picturesque destination in any season.



©Bob Sowa, Friends of State Parks, ncfsp.org

Lake James was named for James B. Duke, founder of Duke Power Company. The 6,510-acre lake was built between 1916 and 1923 and has been a hydroelectric unit for Duke Power since the early 1900s.

The park is open year-round. Hours fluctuate according to the season. The swim area is open May 1 to September 30 from 10:00 AM until 6:00 PM. Walk-in campsites (with no electricity) are available, and restroom and shower facilities are nearby. The camping areas include sites for people with disabilities, and reservations are strongly advised. Canoe rentals are also available at the park.

If you would like more information about Lake James State Park, call (919) 733.4181 or visit [parkinfo@ncmail.net](mailto:parkinfo@ncmail.net).

— Donna Teasley

## Environmental Stewardship — Sound timber management

In this age of living green, folks are often outraged by timber harvests occurring nearby. Homeowners often become offended by the aesthetics of such harvests and profoundly declare that timber harvests are harmful to the environment. This perceived harm, however, is not always the case.

Trees are one of our most renewable resources. Unlike the remains of ancient dinosaurs, trees will resume growth and flourish. These resources provide us with many products that make our lives simpler and more comfortable, and proper forest management can enhance our environment.

For forest landowners wanting to market timber, make sure to conduct harvests the right way. Always avoid high grading – selecting the best, most productive trees and leaving behind trees of marginal quality to remain as the next forest and the seed source for future forests. The next harvest will remove these lower-value trees, yield will be reduced, and more acres will

be required to meet local demand. While timber harvesting is not bad, accelerated harvesting is not in the best interest of our natural resources and can result in conflict with the growing public demand to manage these resources responsibly.

Timber harvests should always start with a plan. With a written management plan, you can define your objectives and stay on track. Often it is a good idea to seek the advice of a professional forester. A forester can help you develop a plan based on your needs and concerns and can help to assure that your plan is carried out for optimum profit and sustainability.

Your forester can procure bids and recommend professional loggers who are willing and able to accommodate your plans. To find a consulting forester in your area, visit the NC Forest Service homepage (<http://ncforestservice.gov>) and click the link for “Consulting Foresters.”

—Damon Pollard

# Tips & Tasks

## Lawn Care

- Keep leaves from collecting on the lawn. Continue mowing as long as grass continues to grow.
- Give the lawn one last application of fertilizer around Thanksgiving. Use a quick-release fertilizer.
- Crabgrass preventer may be applied to cool-season grasses as early as mid February.
- Cool-season grasses may be fertilized as early as February.

## Ornamentals

- If frigid weather occurs, cover shrubs with burlap. Use white plastic if protecting from cold wind.
- Hardwood cuttings of some shrubs (such as forsythia, crape myrtle and hydrangea) may be taken.
- Prune shade trees (such as oak, hickory, poplar, beech and sweet gum) in January.
- Use de-icing products that are safe for lawns and plants.
- Prune ornamental grasses and summer-flowering shrubs in February.

## Edibles

- Plant 1-year-old asparagus crowns in December.
- Prune established blueberries by cutting back a third of the oldest canes to ground level.
- Prune fruit trees and grape vines in February.
- Prepare gardens for early vegetable crops, such as lettuce, cabbage or broccoli.
- Mulch strawberries with pine needles or wheat or barley straw in December.

—Donna Teasley

Camellia 'Winter's Charm'



## Sustainability

### Build and Maintain Healthy Soil

The secret to gardening success is in the soil. Many areas where we garden are deficient in nutrients, stripped of topsoil and compacted. Simply digging a hole and sticking a plant in it usually results in failure. Learn what your soil needs through soil testing. Find out how at your local NC Cooperative Extension center. Test results will tell you if lime or nutrients are needed and in what quantities. No matter what you are growing (flowers, fruit, lawn, shrubs, trees or vegetables), plants will do better grouped in beds of well-prepared soil. Dig or till the soil 6 inches deep, add 2 to 3 inches of compost and work the compost in. Add a couple of inches of organic mulch after planting and when the mulch thins to stabilize soil, prevent weeds, feed the soil and conserve water.

— Danny Lauderdale

### Pest Alert — Eastern moles

The eastern mole causes a lot of anxiety in Carolina lawns. We all know what mole runs or tunnels look like: ridges in your lawn 1½ inches wide. These tunnels can run for tremendous distances. According to Florida Extension specialists, moles can tunnel up to 18 feet an hour! All this tunneling is a search for food. Moles feed on insects, grubs and even earthworms.

Most of the visible damage moles do is from disturbing the roots of grass plants. Because so many of us spend lots of time and money on our lawns, mole damage is, at the least, worrisome. So what can we do? First, decide if the damage is severe enough to warrant control. A

### Showstopper — Winter series camellias

Would you like to grow camellias but fear they can't handle winter weather? Choose varieties from the "winter series." Thanks to advancements in breeding by William Ackerman of the National Arboretum, camellias are not out of reach for gardeners in the NC mountains. The winter series includes dozens of varieties. The most popular cold-hardy cultivars have the word "winter" in their names – including 'Winter's Interlude', 'Winter's Star', 'Winter's Waterlily' and 'Winter's Charm'. Others such as 'Pink Icicle' and 'Snow Flurry' are equally tough. These cherished southern evergreens can be enjoyed in gardens further west and north in USDA Hardiness Zone 6. Camellias prefer partial shade and well-drained acidic soil. Some cultivars will flower as early as October. Most bloom from November to January when nothing else is in flower. Wow – they have to be showstoppers!

— John Vining

### Edibles — Microgreens

Microgreens are unique specialty crops grown for garnishes or to add flavor and color in salads and other dishes. Lacking any legal definition, microgreens are vegetable plants harvested once they reach the first-true-leaf stage. Typically the greens are harvested when plants are 2 inches high with the stem, cotyledons and first true leaves still attached. Microgreens are planted densely to maximize production. They can be grown in seeding trays or beds in fine-textured media with good drainage. Little to no fertilizer is required. Depending on the vegetable variety, most microgreens are harvested one to three weeks after seeding by cutting them with scissors just above the soil line. They are highly perishable and should be refrigerated immediately after harvest. Popular microgreens include radish, cabbage, kale, beet, mustard and Swiss chard.

—Howard Wallace

single run is not a signal to bombard your soil with a pesticide. Even if you have a single run, the mole may not be feeding on grubs. Another favorite mole food is earthworms. Realize, too, that mole activity is not all negative. Moles help to aerate heavy soils, allowing air, water and humus to penetrate deeper into the soil. They also feed on grubs that feed on roots of grass plants.

If you decide that the damage is unacceptable, there are many ways to manage mole populations. For more information, check out the NC Cooperative Extension wildlife specialists' management site: [www.ces.ncsu.edu/nreos/wild/wildlife/animals/mammals/moles.htm](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/nreos/wild/wildlife/animals/mammals/moles.htm)

— Jeff Rieves

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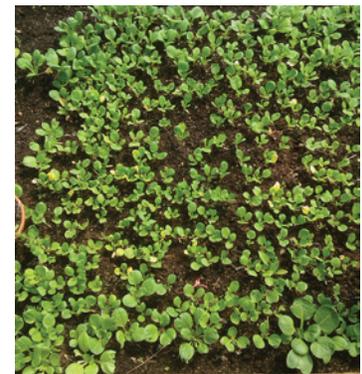
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Microgreens are planted densely and harvested early.  
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