

EXTENSION'S

Successful

Gardener

NC STATE UNIVERSITY NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

Helping
Carolinians In
The Piedmont
Increase Their
Knowledge of
Gardening &
Manage Their
Landscape
Investment

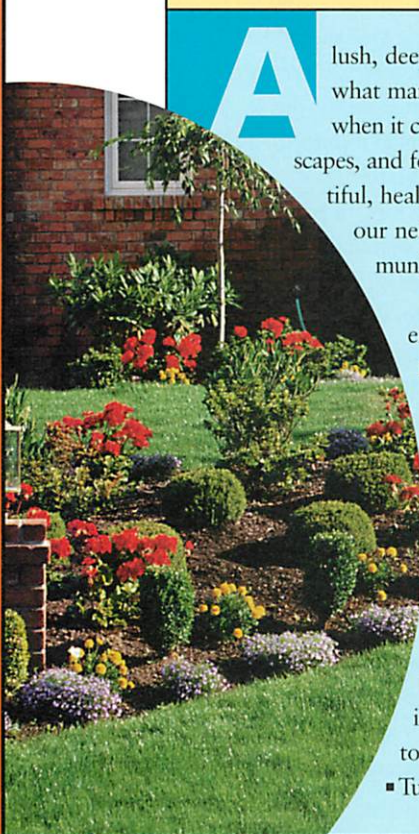
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Healthy Lawn, Healthy Environment



A lush, deep green mat of grass is what many of us dream about when it comes to our home landscapes, and for good reason. A beautiful, healthy lawn provides us, our neighbors and our communities with many benefits.

In addition to the enjoyment value of beautiful lawns, consider these environmental and economic benefits.

- According to the Professional Lawn Care Association of America, front lawns of just eight average houses have the cooling effect of about 70 tons of air conditioning.
- Turfgrass, particularly in

our urban areas, can help reduce carbon dioxide emissions, mitigating the heat island effect and reducing energy consumption, which helps reduce global warming trends.

- Healthy lawns absorb rainfall, preventing runoff and erosion. Turfgrass acts as a filter to capture and break down many types of pollutants before they enter our streams.
- A turf area just 50-feet by 50-feet absorbs carbon dioxide, ozone and other atmospheric pollutants, and releases enough oxygen to meet the needs of a family of four.
- According to Gallup polls and the Turfgrass Council of North Carolina, a proper and well-maintained landscape adds 15% to a home's value.

Healthy lawns make a healthier environment for all of us. For more information, read the page 2 article on lawns, call your county Cooperative Extension center and contract with a certified professional.

— The Editor

Pick 'Pia' for Urban Gardens



The hydrangea macrophylla 'Pia' is a perfect plant choice if you're looking for a dwarf hydrangea for a shady patio or courtyard garden.

This N.C. Association of Nurserymen Raulston Selection Plant is an excellent choice for Carolina gardens. 'Pia' performs best in shade and rewards its owner with profuse showy pink blooms that last throughout most of the summer. Unlike many hydrangeas, 'Pia' flowers remain pink even in acidic soils. This dwarf variety will grow to between 2 and 3 feet, with dark green foliage. It is a good choice to mix with larger hydrangeas. The flowers dry easily for indoor decoration.

Hydrangea macrophylla 'Pia' is named in honor of Pia di Tolomei, one of Dante's tragic heroines in "The Divine Comedy."

Jonathan Nyberg

Editor's Note: Jonathan Nyberg works for N.C. State's J.C. Raulston Arboretum.



Lawn Care Basics for Spring

Lush carpets of green lawn help make our homes and neighborhoods beautiful. We also reap many other benefits from our lawns. They serve as great filters as water runs off property, keeping nutrients and soil from leaving. Healthy lawns also are able to withstand damaging pests, reducing the need for pesticides. Beautiful lawns add value to your property.

Most lawn work, in terms of aerating and fertilizing, particularly tall fescue lawns, should be done during the fall season. However, there are a few basics to consider as you gear up for the spring growing season. If you plan to fertilize a tall fescue lawn, do so before March 15.

- Check out your lawn mower. Does the blade need sharpening or replacing? Don't wait until the grass needs cutting. A dull blade will tear the leaf blade providing a potential entrance for diseases. Remember to check the oil and gas before beginning.
- Fertilizing the lawn can be critical to keeping a quality lawn from year to year. Timing of application, materials used and amount applied are parts of this quality management. Before March 15 is the time to fertilize tall fescue lawns, but it's too early for warm season grasses like zoysia, Bermuda or centipede.
- Fertilizing cool season lawns after March 15 causes rapid growth during the early summer, which results in stress and disease such as brown patch.
- How much fertilizer do you need? A rule of thumb is to apply 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet. If you are not sure what this means, then look at this in another way. If you have a bag of 16-4-8 fertilizer and want to apply

1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet, follow this simple formula:

Divide 100 by 16 = 6.25 pounds of fertilizer. This means that you will need to spread 6.25 pounds of this material over the 1000 square feet to get 1 pound of actual nitrogen. Remember, in a 16-4-8 bag only 16% of the material in that bag is nitrogen, the rest is other nutrients, sand and clay. Using a turf-type fertilizer, like most garden centers carry, with 10 to 15% of the nitrogen being in the form of slow release is better for the grass and you. This means that the fertilizer slowly releases the nitrogen over a 10- to 12-week period, reducing fast spurts of growth and the number of mowing cycles in the spring. Slow release also reduces the chance of nutrient runoff from your yard into streams.

- Do not core aerify a tall fescue lawn in the spring; this should be done in the fall! Spring aeration can increase turf insect problems.
- Mow the grass at 3 inches and never allow the lawn to grow more than 5 to 6 inches high. Removal of more than one-third of the total grass blade will injure the plant. **Stephen Greer**

greenvalue

Do you ever wonder how the agricultural industry impacts our urban economy? The turfgrass industry sector alone has an economic impact by adding \$1.6 billion to the North Carolina economy each year, and by employing about 176,300 people.



gardentalk

Compared to gardeners, others understand very little about anything of consequence.

— Henry Mitchell



Grasscycle for Healthier Lawn

Grasscycling is an ecologically and financially sound program for your lawn. By leaving grass clippings on the lawn you can generate up to 25% of the lawn's yearly fertilizer needs and reduce the amount of time and money spent on fertilizing and bagging. When you mow regularly, clippings quickly decompose and release nutrients to fertilize the lawn. Your lawn will also grow at an acceptable rate, retain a green color and develop a deeper, healthier root system. **Karen Neill**

Q&A How do you control moss in a lawn?

For some reason, moss has very low poll numbers.

Instead of being a symbol of purity, or a sign of antiquity, it often spends its life struggling with unhappy people. Even more surprising, people are least happy about moss in early spring. Now is when moss is the prettiest. I sympathize with the moss but, since you asked, here is how to control it. Moss grows when there is shade, poor drainage or poor soil nutrition. You must determine which

condition is present and then change it. The moss will decline when you cut down the trees, improve the drainage, fertilize and lime. If shade is the problem, consider replacing the moss with mulch or another plant. Some plants will grow in shade. Lawn grass is not one of them. Try vinca, lirioppe, mondo, variegated Solomon's seal, or ask the garden center for its shade-loving selection. Moss is another pretty plant for the shade. Oops, that is the one you are trying to get rid of. *David Goforth*

Proper Planting Produces Astonishing Azaleas

Carolina gardeners love azaleas and these showy plants certainly provide bursts of color to our landscapes. Many homeowners find that far too many azaleas decline and die before their time. Pesticides are not the answer to what ails many azaleas and other plants. Azaleas and their acid-tolerant relatives – rhododendrons, camellias, gardenias – need a soil that is well-drained and rich in organic matter.

Preparing raised beds, planting to elevate the crown of the plant and mulching with pine straw or pine bark are all helpful. Plant azaleas in places protected from the hot afternoon sun and excessive wind. The filtered shade of pines, instead of heavy shade, is often ideal.

Poor site selection and soil preparation are two of the main reasons plants perform poorly in the landscape. For more information, call your local Cooperative Extension center and request the information leaflets, "Azaleas for North Carolina" and "Azalea Culture for North Carolina."

If you have Internet access, go to <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hlandscnew.html> and click on the names of these leaflets. *Kevin Starr*

ENVIRO-TIP

Water Quality Issues and the Home Landscape

Wise horticultural practices help protect our environment. When it comes to water quality, eroding soil and high nutrient and pesticide levels can be harmful.

Points to consider:

Soil Erosion – Movement of soil particles and organic matter in runoff is double trouble for the environment. The sediment and the chemicals attached to these soil particles can choke streams and lakes and make them unsuitable for recreational activities. To protect against erosion, utilize ground covers, grasses and mulches. Cover newly seeded lawns with straw or organic mats.

Nutrient Management – Too much nitrogen and phosphorus in surface water causes excessive algae

growth. Excess phosphorus is carried on eroded soil particles while nitrogen may leach past plant roots to accumulate in groundwater or move into surface water. Never over fertilize; always follow soil test recommendations. Sweep granules of fertilizer that fall on hard surfaces back onto the lawn or garden.

Pesticide Management –

Excessive use of pesticides can lead to them being deposited in lakes and streams. Identify the pest to determine action needed and select the proper pesticide. Read label directions and use the lowest effective rate listed. This is where your local Cooperative Extension agent can help you most! Buy pesticides in small quantities so that you will not have excess amounts to dispose. *Royce Hardin*





Garden Spot

Greensboro's "Bog Garden" is one of the city's most unusual parks. In contrast to more formal gardens, the Bog has been left wild and ungroomed much like a nature preserve.

A boardwalk loops over the marsh and nature trails run up the hillside. Seven designated points of interest are named for dedicated volunteers who helped build the garden. Among the features is a lake overlook surrounded by swamp roses and bald cypress trees; the Bog Bottom showing off water-loving plants including cattails, cardinal flowers, pitcher plants, water lilies and water iris; and existing hardwoods where the laurel stand out with their wonderful, dark twisted trunks. At the peak, a 300-year-old white oak tree commands the view.

A visit to the Bog Garden this spring rewards visitors with blooming bloodroot and trillium.

The Bog Garden, free and open to the public, is located across the street from the Bicentennial Garden at 1105 Hobbs Road. Call (336) 373-2199 for more information. *Karen Neill*

Gardening in March

What to Fertilize

- Fertilize your shade trees.
- Fertilize asparagus early in March before spear growth begins.
- Before planting your vegetables, fertilize your garden as recommended by your soil test results.

What to Plant

- Plant your small fruit plants, grapevines and fruit trees before the buds break.
- Plant new shrubs and ground covers.
 - Plant new rose bushes this month.
 - Plant seeds of the following perennials: columbine, hollyhock, coreopsis, daisy and phlox.
 - Set out broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and other cool season plants in mid-March.

What to Prune

- Prune spring flowering plants like forsythia, spirea, winter honeysuckle and flowering quince as the flowers fade.
 - Prune roses early in the month before bud break.
 - Prune shrubs like abelia, mahonia and nandina.

Pest Outlook

- Check the following shrubs for these insect pests: tea scale on camellia, scale on euonymus and spider mites on juniper. Treat if needed.
 - Start your rose spray program just prior to bud break. Spray roses for black spot every 7 to 10 days until the end of the growing season.
 - Spray your apple and pear trees with streptomycin for control of fireblight. Pears must be sprayed.



Tune in to "Making It Grow!" – a gardening show featuring Extension agents from the Carolinas. Saturdays, 1 p.m. WTVI 42, Charlotte

Successful Gardener is provided to you compliments of:



The *Successful Gardener* provides timely, research-based horticultural information to help Carolinians make wise landscape investment decisions and gain greater enjoyment from their lawns and gardens. The newsletter is part of an overall horticulture program which includes Extension's Successful Gardener Workshop Series in various counties throughout the Piedmont region. We publish monthly except January and July. Comments concerning *Successful Gardener* may be sent to:

Successful Gardener Editor
Mecklenburg County Extension Center
700 N. Tryon St.
Charlotte, NC 28202

Editor and Project Coordinator:
Leah Chester-Davis
Area Specialized Agent, Marketing & Media Relations, Mecklenburg, Gaston, Cabarrus

Project Coordinator:
Stephen Greer
Urban Horticulture Agent, Gaston County

Compilations Editor:
John MacNair
Urban Forestry Agent, Mecklenburg County

Contributors:

County	Name	Phone
Cabarrus	David Goforth	(704)792-0420
Durham	James Lee	(919)560-8223
Forsyth	Toby Bost	(910)767-8223
Gaston	Stephen Greer	(704)922-0301
Guilford	Karen Neill	(910)375-5876
Lincoln	Kevin Starr	(704)736-8452
Mecklenburg	John MacNair	(704)336-2561
Orange	Royce Hardin	(919)732-8181
Polk	John Vining	(828)894-8218
Rowan	Darrell Blackwelder	(704)633-0571
Union	Willie Earl Wilson	(704)283-3741
Wake	Carl Matyac	(919)250-1116

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Ask for Extension's Successful Gardener at one of your local garden centers each month!

For a list of garden centers where you can find *Successful Gardener*, please call (704)336-2561 or look on our Home Page at <http://mecklenburg.ces.state.nc.us/>

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