

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES

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

Season for Dream Gardening

Have you taken care of those end-of-the-season chores to make sure you're ready for next spring? One thing I've learned is that properly caring for gardening tools and implements now ensures a pleasant first day of gardening next spring. The last thing I want to have to do next spring is deal with maintenance when I'd much rather be making visits to the local garden center or digging in the dirt! The page 3 article, *Tool Time*, gives some guidelines on what to do now.

My little herb garden enables me to enjoy something from my garden year-round. Another way to enjoy year-round gardening is to take advantage of the many available resources, and the winter months are perfect for checking them out. The Cooperative Extension Service is an excellent resource for you. We're in every county of the state and have available lots of research-based horticulture information. You also can access our web page to learn more about gardening in North Carolina. Access <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/>.

Make a mental note to watch for information about Extension's Successful Gardener Seminar Series that we will offer in four metropolitan areas early next spring. These seminars will feature the latest in lawns and gardens and provide you with useful tips, whether you're a novice or a seasoned gardener! In the meantime, enjoy the season for dream gardening! *The Editor*



inside

2

Composting

3

Enviro-Tip

4

Garden Spot

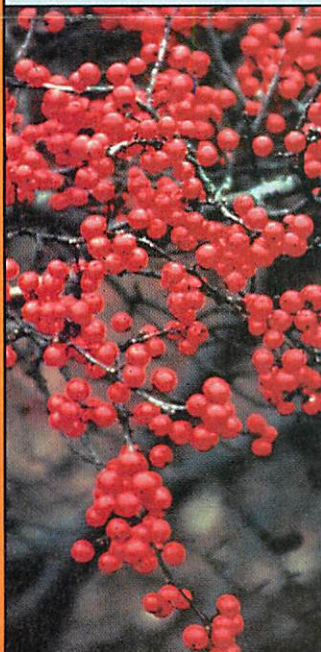
'Carolina Cardinal' Holly Brightens Winter

When winter's gray clouds, withered brown leaves and barren trees dull our landscapes, 'Carolina Cardinal' adds a burst of fiery red fruit. This shrub is a deciduous holly that wears a coat of glossy, 1/4-inch red fruits in winter to make a spectacular show, rightfully being named for our state bird.

In summer, the lush green foliage has an aesthetic cooling effect. In autumn, the red berries are high-

lighted against the foliage before the leaves drop. Cuttings are attractive when used with holiday greenery.

'Carolina Cardinal' grows to about 8- to 10-feet tall and about as wide. This N.C. Association of Nurserymen Raulston Selection Plant has no insect and disease problems and is an adaptable, tough plant. For amazing results, group two or three 'Carolina Cardinal' hollies and watch the birds enjoy a winter feast. *John MacNair*





Composting: How to Turn Trash to Treasure

Composting is the way to turn those leaves, grass clippings, garden refuse, straw and table scraps that we all accumulate into a product that benefits any landscape.

That clay you planted your shrubs in, or try to garden in, would benefit greatly by the addition of composted organic material. Compost in soil results in better water infiltration, better drainage and better aeration. Mulching plants with two to three inches of compost also provides excellent weed control. It only makes sense to use a readily available source of organic matter to ensure success in our landscaping and gardening ventures.

Gardeners would be well advised to add compost to flower beds before planting shrubs and flowers.

So where do we start? The compost process requires four elements: organic matter, a nitrogen source if your organic matter does not provide it, water and oxygen.

To accelerate the composting process, ground up the organic materials in some way. In my opinion, a chipper or shredder should become as common a garden tool as a lawn mower, or you can run a lawn mower over a pile of leaves and reduce the pile

nicely. Next, pile up the leaves and other material in an unused part of your yard. For every bushel of leaves in the pile include some type of material that contains nitrogen. Manure, some grass clippings, food waste or a cup of fertilizer will work. A pile at least 3 feet tall and 3 feet wide is about the right size. Many gardeners like compost bins. These can be constructed with a wood frame and sides can be wood or wire mesh. Two bins facilitate turning the compost which should be done every 30 to 45 days. Either wait for rain or start the process immediately by saturating the pile with a garden hose.

The compost pile is similar to a fermentation process. The microorganisms such as fungi, bacteria, actinomycetes and algae, as well as insects and earthworms, provide energy and nutrients for themselves by "eating" or decomposing organic matter. This decomposition results in a changed and partially modified organic residue called humus. The humus, sometimes referred to as "black gold," is the by-product we want for our soil. After a few months, you will have an ideal product to use to enhance your garden projects. And you will have created it from material we normally throw away. *Carl Matyac*



Robert E. Lyons 1999 ©

gardentalk

"Both gardens and spirits are renewed on crisp November mornings."

— Toby Bost

Power Trees: What to Plant Near Utility Lines

"The right plant in the right place," is well worth considering particularly when planting near utility lines. Even if the tree you plant is small now, think about its growth pattern and its typical size at maturity. Avoid future heartbreak by not planting large maturing trees such as oaks and maples near utility lines. Your best bet when planting near utility lines is to choose a plant that remains smaller at maturity.

Fortunately, you have lots of good trees from which to choose. Among the small maturing trees to consider are crape myrtle, 'Autumn Brilliance' service berry, 'Carolina Cardinal' holly, 'Oklahoma' redbud or 'Fragrant Snow' Japanese flowering apricot. Local nurseries can provide additional suggestions on low growing alternatives. Small maturing trees may be planted directly underneath or adjacent to overhead lines whereas larger maturing species should be placed further back, depending on their normal size at maturity.

If your heart is set on the large maturing trees such as oaks or maples, plant them at least 40 feet from utility lines. Branches on these trees can spread two feet each year. A 12-foot-wide tree, just 20 feet from a utility line, could cause line interference in seven years.

Anyone who has been through a hurricane and without power due to trees on power lines understands the importance of wise planting near power lines. Unfortunately, even if an oak is under or within 30 feet of a utility line it's going to eventually need severe pruning or removal. Utility companies attempt to prune trees correctly and most

utilities no longer top trees. They now use natural target pruning which involves removing a branch back to its place of natural attachment, called the "branch collar." This is the point where tissue can seal itself off from future decay. However, the larger the branch the harder it is for the tree to "wall itself off" from the injury, no matter how good the pruning. There's no need for homeowners to paint tree wounds. A tree has its own natural defense system and if it doesn't seal off a wound, nothing will.

Many people think utility line burial solves the problem. Though it's more attractive and is more common in new neighborhoods or renovated downtowns, it doesn't allow for total freedom in planting large trees. When underground lines are first installed and when underground outages occur, the lines have to be redug which can damage the roots just as improper pruning above can damage the overhead portion of the tree limbs. The best bet continues to be proper plant selection. *John MacNair*

Helpful websites:

www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/
Click on Horticulture Information Leaflets.
Go to Landscape Leaflet 8618

www.duke-energy.com
Click on Customer, then Residential, then
Vegetation Management

Q&A Why are ladybugs in my house and what can I do about it ?

A new type of ladybug came to the

United States in the early 1990s. In its native China, the multi-colored Asian lady beetle overwintered in caves. Evidently, our houses work just as well. Lady beetles do not lay eggs or raise young inside the home. Lady beetles don't harm humans. Every few days some of them will show up ready for spring. When they do, I suggest becoming a bug-tolerant person. This gives you the conven-

ience of observing and enjoying nature without leaving the house. In addition, nothing else works. Vacuum up excess ladybugs. A vacuum cleaner will not kill the ladybugs, so you need to empty the bag. Do this outdoors, so they will find someplace else to overwinter. It is unsafe, unwise and ineffective to declare chemical warfare inside your home. While ladybugs can be killed, there are no pesticides you want to apply inside your home every few days. **David Goforth**



Successful Gardener Series

Coming Soon to a Location Near You!
Extension's Regional Successful Gardener Seminar Series. Watch for Details!

ENVIRO-TIP

Use Fertilizer Properly

The main reason we fertilize is to provide nutrients to plants which keeps them healthy. However, improper fertilization practices can pose a risk to ground and surface water quality. Nitrogen and phosphorus are the nutrients most likely to affect water quality. Phosphorus can cause algal blooms and abnormal growth of aquatic plants in surface water. Excess nitrogen is often associated with an increase in thatch accumulation, decreased tolerance to insect, disease and environmental stress and reduced root system development.

In order to minimize the effects of fertilizer on the environment and reduce the negative effects overfertilization has on plants, follow these guidelines.

- Base fertilizer applications on a soil test. Soil tests show the level of nutrients already in the soil. Contact your local Cooperative Extension Center to receive information on proper soil sampling.

- Core aerate compacted soil. Coring will facilitate fertilizers, especially phosphorus, getting into the soil.
- Do not apply fertilizers into bodies of water, drainage ways or on hard surfaces such as drives or walkways where it will run off into surface water.
- Use slow-release forms of nitrogen, especially on sandy soils.
- Time applications carefully to avoid runoff or leaching. Avoid applying prior to heavy rainfall periods.
- Apply .25 to .50 inch of irrigation following application of quickly available fertilizers. This moves the material off the foliage and into the soil where it is utilized by the plants.
- Practice grasscycling. Allow grass clippings to remain on the lawn to decompose and recycle nutrients. If clippings are removed, utilize them as a light mulch or in a compost pile.

Royce Hardin

Tool Time

After the bulbs are planted and the last leaves are gathered, make sure you give some attention to your garden tools and implements before you put them away for the winter. Hand tools and power equipment perform better and last longer with proper care and storage. Clean hoes, rakes and shovels before their winter hiatus. Wash off soil and sharpen if necessary. Take a close look at the fertilizer and lime spreader. Fertilizer residues corrode metal gears and other metal parts reducing the life of the spreader. A thin coat of lightweight oil applied to the metal prevents these tools from unnecessary corrosion.

Pruners may need blade replacements or new springs. Replace old blades and springs now to ensure readiness for early spring pruning.

Replace the oil and clean the air filter on lawn mowers and garden tillers. Paper filters may need to be replaced. Inspect the spark plug and replace if needed. Over-wintering gas loses its octane and may cause carburetor problems later. Special additives help prevent these problems.

Inspect underneath the lawn mower deck for rust spots and accumulated grass clippings. Use a putty knife to scrape off accumulated grass clippings and spray the underneath of the mower with a thin oil to prevent rust. Sharpen the mower blade now or replace with a new mulching blade. Mulching lawn mower blades reduce excess clippings and add organic matter back to the lawn. **Darrell Blackwelder**





Gardening in November

What to Plant

- Transplant deciduous or leaf-losing trees and shrubs after their leaves fall in autumn.
- Plant one-year-old asparagus crowns in the vegetable garden.
- Continue planting spring-flowering bulbs such as daffodil and crocus. Be sure to mix lime and a balanced fertilizer into the planting soil.

What to Prune

- Trim existing asparagus foliage. Cut to the ground after the foliage is killed by frost.
 - Do not prune shrubs or trees at this time.

Lawn Care

- Mow newly seeded cool season lawns such as tall fescue or bluegrass as needed.
 - Keep tree leaves from collecting on your lawn.
 - Tall fescue and bluegrass turfgrasses will benefit from a third and final fertilization.

Specific Chores

- Soil test results should be back if samples were sent in September or October. Apply recommended lime to the areas in need of liming. Wait and fertilize in the spring.
- Remember to water your evergreen trees and shrubs thoroughly before winter sets in, particularly if weather conditions have been dry this autumn.
- Continue filling the compost bin with fallen leaves.
- Look for yuletide plants as gifts. Remember, some plants such as poinsettias should be placed in the sunniest room in the house.
- Consider giving your family gardener a holiday gift to use in the garden. *John Vining*

The UNC Charlotte Botanical Gardens

were started in 1966 when seven acres were planted with native trees, shrubs, hybrid rhododendrons, wildflowers and ferns. This later became named the Van Landingham Rhododendron Glen. The next area to be added was the Susie Harwood Ornamental Garden with another three acres being planted as formal gardens. There are woody plants and perennials from around the world that make up this collection. The last area to be added was the McMillan Orchid Greenhouse with over 4,000 square feet of tropical plants on display. This includes a tropical rainforest conservatory as well as four other different growing environments and an extensive collection of species orchids. The orchids are used for teaching as well as display and several have won awards from the American Orchid Society.

The gardens, which are located on the UNC Charlotte campus, are free to the public and open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Mondays through Fridays, and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturdays. Call (704) 547-2000.

Karen Neill

Garden Spot



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: **Emily Revels**
Consumer Horticulture Agent, Mecklenburg County

Compilations Editor: **John MacNair**
Urban Forestry Agent, Mecklenburg County

Assistant Editor: **Karen Neill**
Consumer Horticulture Agent, Guilford County

Contributors:

County	Name	Phone
Cabarrus	David Goforth	(704) 792-0430
Catawba	Fred Miller	(828) 465-8240
Durham	Paul McKenzie	(919) 560-0525
Forsyth	Toby Bost	(336) 767-8213
Gaston		(704) 922-0700
Guilford	Karen Neill	(336) 375-0700
Lincoln	Kevin Starr	(704) 736-8452
Mecklenburg	John MacNair	(704) 336-2561
	Emily Revels	(704) 336-2561
Orange	Royce Hardin	(919) 732-8181
Polk	John Vining	(828) 894-8218
Randolph		(336) 318-6005
Rowan	Darrell Blackwelder	(704) 633-0571
Union	Willie Earl Wilson	(704) 283-3741
Wake	Carl Matyac	(919) 250-1100

All Agents of N.C. Cooperative Extension

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 visit Cooperative Extension on the web at <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu>

Disclaimer: The use of brand names does not imply endorsement by N.C. Cooperative Extension nor discrimination against similar products or services not mentioned.

Distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914. Employment and program opportunities are offered to all people regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability. N.C. State University, N.C. A&T State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture and local government cooperating. Vol. 1, No. 9

Successful Gardener may not be reproduced without written permission. Any news media using sections of the newsletter should credit "Cooperative Extension's Successful Gardener."



Printed on recycled paper.