

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

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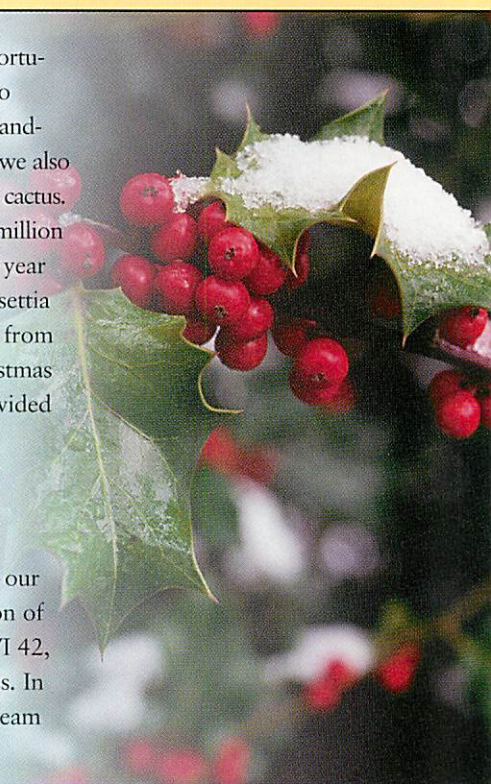
Home-Grown Holiday Cheer!

This is the season to deck the halls, and in the South we are fortunate to be surrounded with beautiful plants we can use to adorn our homes for the holidays! In addition to many landscape plants such as camellias, hollies, pines, mahonias and cedars, we also have the perennial favorites – the poinsettia, amaryllis and Christmas cactus.

North Carolina is a big poinsettia producer. As many as four million pots of poinsettias will be grown in our state's greenhouses this year to supply holiday needs, making our state the sixth largest poinsettia producer. Almost four million Christmas trees will be delivered from our mountains, making North Carolina the second largest Christmas tree producer behind Oregon. That's a lot of holiday cheer provided by our state's horticulture industry!

Make sure you read the page 2 articles on *Prime-Time for Poinsettias* and *Your Christmas Tree Selection & Care Guide* to keep these plants thriving through the season.

The holiday season also is a good time for us to again thank our underwriters for supporting this newsletter: the N.C. Association of Nurserymen, the N.C. Division of Forestry, Duke Energy, WTVI 42, N.C. State University Extension and many participating counties. In this, our last issue of the year, *Extension's Successful Gardener* team wishes you a happy holiday season! *The Editor*



Who Could Resist 'Morning Calm'?

In our hurried world, who could refuse a plant with a name like 'Vine of the Morning Calm'?

Campsis grandiflora 'Morning Calm,' another fine ornamental to receive a rousing ovation from the N.C. Association of Nurserymen by being named a Raulston Selection plant, is an Asian cousin of our rather uninhibited trumpetvine.

This family of hardy native vines is especially attractive to hummingbirds and is pest-free. 'Morning

'Calm' is a docile, deciduous vine with glossy leaves and luscious, three-inch, orange-coral flowers. For the biggest show give it plenty of space to bask in the sun on a sturdy trellis or fence. Expect rampant growth in the early years with spectacular flower displays appearing in late spring as the vine matures. Plant this winner in any soil, wet or dry. Check out this vine and other Raulston Selections at participating nurseries and full-service garden centers. *Toby Bost*



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Prime-Time for Poinsettias and Other Holiday Plants

Flowering gift plants such as the poinsettia, Christmas cactus and amaryllis will stay beautiful longer if their requirements for light, moisture and temperature are met. Place plants where they will receive bright light, preferably sunlight, during the day. Most of these plants last longer where the temperature is 55 to 60 degrees F at night and 65 to 70 degrees F in the daytime. Lowering your thermostat will not only conserve energy but provide better growing conditions for indoor plants. If the temperature is not lowered at night in the room occupied by the plants, move the plants to a cooler room to prolong their beauty. Keep the soil moist but not overly wet, using room-temperature water.

Check soil moisture at regular intervals by penetrating the top two inches of soil with a finger. If the soil feels wet, or even cool, watering is probably not necessary. Make sure pots have good drainage. If the pot is wrapped in foil, do not allow water to accumulate in the bottom. Standing water is best prevented by punching four holes through the foil along the sides near the bottom.

Place the potted plant on a tray or container to catch the excess water. Always water thoroughly. Keep all plants away from radiators, fireplaces and out of hot and cold drafts.

Poinsettia: Put your poinsettia in a place where it will get bright light, but not direct sun. Temperatures above 75 degrees F will shorten bloom life.

Keep soil moisture at moderate and uniform levels, neither soggy wet or bone dry. Drafts, too cool or too warm temperatures, sudden temperature changes, improper water and dim light can cause loss of leaves and withering of bracts. Fertilize once a month with a water soluble fertilizer, always following the manufacturer's directions.

Christmas Cactus: They grow best when night temperatures never exceed 70 degrees F. This helps to keep buds from falling off the plant. Keep near a window but not in direct sun. Keep the soil moist, but avoid over-watering.

Amaryllis: Amaryllis can be purchased at any stage in its development, from a single bulb to the "puffy bud" stage, which is when the plant is almost ready to bloom. Make sure one-third of the bulb, known as the "nose," is above the soil line; place it in a sunny, warm location and watch the leaves and flower stem elongate. No fertilizer is necessary until after flowering. Keep the soil on the dry side; avoid waterlogging. Temperatures should be above 60 degrees F for this tropical plant and high light intensities will help ensure the leaves and flower stem do not stretch and topple over. An average of four weeks is required from planting the bulb to the first open flower. When you see the flower buds begin to swell and turn color, another day or two will result in open flowers. *Karen Neill*

gardentalk

"It is more important for the gardener to be enchanted than for critics to be pleased."

— Henry Mitchell

Your Christmas Tree Selection and Care Guide

What would the holiday season be without the woody scent of a North Carolina Christmas tree? We're fortunate in the Piedmont to be close to choose-and-cut farms, nurseries and cut stands featuring state-grown trees. To find a choose-and-cut farm nearby or in the mountains, contact your county Cooperative Extension Center. Keep in mind that no local, state or federal parks in North Carolina allow cutting of trees.

Choices for Cut Trees

- Fraser fir is the premier Christmas tree in the country and happens to be a native only to North Carolina. Aromatic, long-lasting needles with excellent color and strong limbs for supporting ornaments make this tree a popular choice.
- White pine has long, bluish needles with somewhat rubbery limbs.

- Red cedar and Leyland cypress are traditional Southern, lowland Christmas trees. Needle color is green and needles can often dry out quickly indoors.
- Virginia pine has good needle retention with aromatic, forest green color.

Tips for Indoor Care

- When deciding on a purchase, grab a branch. If needles are brittle and break easily, then find another tree.
- Check for aphids, which are tiny, crawling insects on needles. If aphids are present spray with soapy water and wash off.
- Cut two to three inches off the trunk bottom. This allows water to circulate upward. Place in water within 30 minutes after cutting or make a new cut if transporting.

- Avoid additives such as aspirin, cola or fertilizer. Research has shown no positive effect.
- Check water daily and refill.
- Unplug lights before going to bed.

Choices for Living Christmas Trees

- Fraser fir and white pine are poor choices for the Piedmont.
- Colorado blue spruce, dwarf Alberta spruce, cedar, leyland cypress and Virginia pine are good choices.
- Buy from established nurseries.
- The rootball should be at least 2 feet in diameter and in good condition.
- Keep rootball moist but not wet.
- Keep indoors no longer than 1 week. Plant as soon as possible and remove upper burlap and wire. *John MacNair*

Q&A Should I use pelletized, powdered, hydrated, burnt, agricultural, calcitic or dolomitic lime?

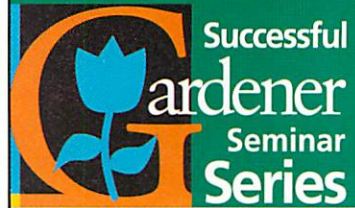
Yes. (I bet you want more detail don't you?) I see how all the names can confuse people, particularly when some terms are technically incorrect. In common usage, agricultural lime refers to limestone rock ground into powder and doesn't include burnt lime (also known as quicklime) or hydrated lime (also known as slacked lime).

Ground limestone becomes burnt lime when heated. When water is added to burnt lime, the lime becomes hydroxidated but everybody says hydrated instead. Burnt lime and hydrated lime have a higher burn potential than powdered limestone rock. You could use them on bare ground but I prefer powdered limestone. Limestone rock

is either calcitic or dolomitic. Calcitic lime is mostly calcium. Dolomitic lime contains calcium and magnesium. Clay soils with high magnesium levels perform poorly. They don't need additional magnesium. Look for the magnesium base saturation (Mg BS) percentage on a soil test. The ideal Mg BS is 10%. Soils with Mg BS over 20% should get calcitic lime. Sandy soils normally require dolomitic lime. Adding water soluble resin to powdered lime forms pellets. Pellets are easier to apply and less messy while powdered lime is cheaper. Use powder when tilling the lime under. For other applications, choose between low cost and less mess.

David Goforth

Announcing Extension's Regional



Topics

Creating a Beautiful Lawn

Learn easy lawn care and maintenance tips from the pros.

The Grandeur of Trees

Learn how to select and care for trees, plants that add significantly to your property's value.

Landscapes Alive!

Learn spring gardening and landscaping basics, from plant selections to turf care.

Creating Color with Annuals and Perennials

Learn how to bring your yard alive with color.

Each seminar will cover basics on wise water, pesticide and fertilizer use.

Dates and Locations

- ▶ **Saturday, February 26**
 - Forsyth Tech, Swisher Center, Kernersville
 - Details: (336) 375-5876
- ▶ **Wednesday, March 1**
 - Southern Spring Show, Charlotte
 - Details: (704) 336-2561
- ▶ **Saturday, April 8**
 - Agricultural Resources Center, Newton
 - Details: (828) 465-8240
- ▶ **Raleigh date and location to be announced.**

ENVIRO- TIP

Landscaping Choices That Benefit the Environment

Your home landscape choices and design can affect the environment. There are several practices and landscape features you can adopt that will lessen this effect and still provide a beautiful, functional setting. Two of those means are the use of natural areas and proper tree placement.

Incorporate Natural Areas

Create natural areas by making mulched beds around existing trees and other problem areas such as low or wet spots. Be creative in designing the natural areas. Follow land contours and incorporate features such as large rocks, seating areas or a water garden. By reducing the amount of lawn area you maintain, you can decrease the amount of fertilizers and lawn pesticides you use and reduce landscape maintenance chores and costs. Natural areas also benefit trees and shrubs by preventing accidental injury and soil compaction caused by lawn equipment and traffic.

Reduce Energy Needs

By properly placing trees and shrubs you can reduce the amount of energy needed to heat and cool your home and thus the amount of fossil fuels consumed for electrical generation.

Shading the roof of a house from the afternoon sun in the summer can reduce inside temperatures by as much as 8 to 10 degrees F. Deciduous trees such as red maples, sugar maples, red oaks, white oaks and hickories planted on the southern and western sides are great choices. They provide summer shade and, when they have lost their leaves, allow the sun to help warm the house, reducing heating requirements on sunny winter days. Plant smaller trees such as dogwood, Japanese maple and crape myrtle closer to the house to shade walls and windows in the summer and again, since they are deciduous, the winter sun can warm these same walls.

Royce Hardin



Robert E. Lyons 1999 ©





Robert E. Lyons, 1999 ©

Sarah P. Duke

Gardens in Durham are a great place to take the whole family, from young children to grandparents. Easy paths to walk along, stepping stones over little ponds and a large, Dawn redwood for children to climb on are a few of the features. The gardens were developed in the 1930s as a 55-acre garden named for the wife of Benjamin N. Duke, one of the founders of Duke University.

The terrace garden, planted with bulbs and seasonal annuals, is the historical core of the garden. The entrance is at the Summit through a magnificent pergola covered with wisteria and at the base is a fabulous fish pond. Other collections include the H.L. Blomquist Garden of native plants just off the Azalea Court Allee, as well as the Rose Garden and the Hanes Iris Garden. Thirty-five acres of pine forest are now being developed into an Asiatic Arboretum.

The gardens are free to the public and open daily from 8 a.m. until dusk. Call (919) 684-3698.

Karen Neill

Gardening in December

What to Fertilize

- None needed on plants outside.
- Use wood ashes from your fireplace or wood-burning stove on your vegetable garden, bulb beds and lightly on your lawns.
- Fertilize houseplants as needed.

What to Plant

- Plant one-year-old asparagus crowns in the vegetable garden.

What to Prune

- Prune berry-producing plants if berries are desired in table arrangements over the holidays.
 - Remove undesirable trees from your landscape.
 - Cut camellia flowers to be enjoyed inside your home.

Lawn Care

- Keep tree leaves from collecting on your lawn.

Propagation

- Take leaf cuttings of your favorite houseplants such as African violets and begonias. Keep cuttings in a heated area.
- Hardwood cuttings of your landscape plants such as forsythia, flowering quince, weigela, crape myrtle and hydrangea can be taken this month. Place these cuttings in a coldframe outside.

Specific Chores

- Put pine needles or wheat straw over your strawberry plants in late December.
- Keep your living Christmas tree outside until ready to decorate.
- Keep your cut Christmas tree in water throughout the holiday season. Christmas trees inside your home can drink up to one gallon of water each day.
- Make a list of needed repairs on garden tools and equipment. Repair or have them repaired after the holidays. *John Vining*



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:

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

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