

Successful Gardener

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES

JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

Dwarf Yaupon – A Plant for All Conditions

Helping Carolinians Increase Their Knowledge of Gardening, Manage Their Landscape Investment & Protect the Environment

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Successful Gardener 1999 Silver Quill Award Winner

Every landscape needs its working-class plants that perform year after year with first-class results. Dwarf yaupon is such a plant. Though writers often get kind of snobbish around working-class plants like dwarf yaupon, these are the very plants you need to meet. Let me introduce dwarf yaupon, *Ilex vomitoria* 'Nana,' to you.

Dwarf yaupon is a carefree, 2- to 4-foot-high, evergreen shrub with fine-textured foliage that allows the gray stems to show off. It looks great anywhere, from full sun areas to partial shade. This shrub can grow to a round mound of 5 feet high and slightly wider. Dwarf yaupon doesn't require heavy pruning but will tolerate it if you are compulsive with a pair of pruners in your hand. It makes a good choice as a sheared plant to use in formal designs or for clipped hedges.

The plant tolerates poor soil and wet or dry conditions. *Ilex vomitoria* 'Nana' was the first plant in my first landscape plan, and 25 years later it still contributes landscape value every day. It grows well in sticky, yellow clay while other species crash and burn. It is resistant to diseases and insects and grows throughout the state, though it's especially popular in coastal areas.

The JC Raulston Arboretum at NC State University in Raleigh is a good place to view several varieties of yaupon hollies. The dwarf yaupon commands a significant site within the arboretum. Upon entering the White Garden, directly in from the parking lot, you'll note a neatly tailored, woody edging material along the interior patio. This is the dwarf yaupon at its most formal, defining the bed line as it zigzags in right angle patterns. Keep strolling through the arboretum and you will come across other cultivars of this versatile plant, such as the form called 'Pendula,' 'Jewel' for its heavy fruit production and 'Grey's Littleleaf' with extra small leaves and new reddish-purple growth.

The arboretum is located at 4301 Beryl Road in Raleigh and is open all year from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Check out the arboretum website www.arb.ncsu.edu for more information and maps or call (919) 515-3132. **David Goforth**



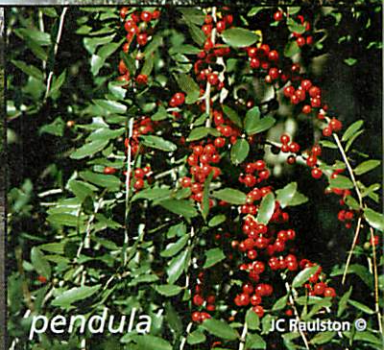
'pendula'

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'nana'

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'pendula'

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Design Landscape for Wise Water Use

Many North Carolina residents are learning it's not uncommon to be asked to restrict water use during periods of summer drought. With only a limited supply of usable water and increased land development, this could become the way of life for many. Homeowners who want to continue to water their landscapes must practice water conservation now rather than waiting until an emergency arises. After all, water is the lifeblood of plants. It's required for seed germination, plant growth, nutrient transportation and photosynthesis.

One of the best means of conserving water is to design or modify the landscape to reduce its water requirements. Landscaping that reduces water needs is commonly called xeriscaping, which was coined from the Greek word *xeros*, meaning dry.

Water-conserving features to consider:

- Limit the amount of lawn area and locate turf where it will be used, such as play areas. Turf is the biggest water user in the landscape, therefore it's important to use drought-tolerant turf mixes. As an alternative to turf, use mulch and tough, drought-tolerant groundcovers.
- Use surfacing materials for patios and walks that allow water penetration into the ground and that reduce sun glare and heat build-up. Examples are wood decks; brick or stone on a sand base for patios; and wood chips, pea gravel or stepping stones on a sand base for paths and walks.
- Group plants with similar cultural (sun, moisture, soil) requirements.
- Use native, drought-tolerant or drought-resistant

plant species. Suggestions for drought-tolerant plants for North Carolina landscapes can be found in the Extension brochure titled "Drought-Tolerant Plants for N.C. Landscapes."

- Group together and limit the use of water-loving plants. Place these plants in shaded, moisture-conserving areas or where they will have a high visual impact. For color in the landscape, use flowering trees, shrubs, perennials, groundcovers and plants with variegated foliage as an alternative to annuals that require more care and water.
- Match the plant's water requirements with the soil moisture-holding capacity; for example, place drought-tolerant plants under eaves where the soil is always dry.
- Mulch planting beds to conserve soil moisture, control competitive weeds and improve soil conditions as the mulch deteriorates.

When you need to apply water do it only as fast as the soil can absorb it. Apply water in a sufficient quantity to moisten the soil to a depth of 10 to 12 inches for trees and shrubs and 6 to 8 inches for flowers. Light sprinklings waste water and do little to satisfy the water requirements of a plant growing in hot, dry soil. A slow trickle or drip for several hours is best.

Another way to conserve water in the landscape is to control weeds since they use up available water. Reduce fertilization since it promotes plant growth which increases the need for water. Remove poorly growing plants so water isn't wasted caring for them. **Karen Neill**

gardentalk

"Horticulturally, the month of May is opening night, Homecoming, and Graduation Day all rolled into one."

— Tam Mossman



Robert E. Lyons ©

Thin Fruit for Optimum Yields

Many fruit crops have a tendency to overbear due to the trees having more small fruit than they can bring to maturity. When the trees are young, it's best not to allow them to bear fruit for the first two years after planting. Bearing fruit too early can decrease the tree's growth and bend the framework branches or scaffolds.

Once mature, apples, nectarines, peaches and pears all produce too many immature fruit which need to be thinned. If all of the fruit that sets is left on the tree the result will be a disappointing crop of smaller-than-normal fruit at maturity. Another common problem is broken limbs due to the inability of branches to support the heavy load of fruit. The amount to thin from a tree depends on the tree's

size and bearing capacity. Obviously, trees in poor vigor should not be allowed to bear as much fruit as moderately vigorous trees. If a tree has set a uniform crop of fruit, a general rule of thumb is to thin fruit 6 to 8 inches apart on the shoot. Clusters of fruit should be broken so that orchard sprays can cover the fruit well.

Guidelines on proper care of fruit trees are available from your county Cooperative Extension center. Ask for "Producing Tree Fruit for Home Use" or access NC State's web page www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/ Click on Horticulture Leaflets. Go to Bulletins. **Carl Matyac**

Q&A Why are scattered young limbs turning black on my apple tree?

The most likely reason young apple limbs turn black in early spring is fire blight. You can be sure it's fire blight if you see a crook in the end of the young limb. This bacterial disease also affects pears, pyracantha and cotoneaster along with 126 other species in the rose family. Honeybees carry the bacteria while they pollinate the blooms. Once fire blight gets on the plant, it is splattered by rain. Prune the dying branch to control this disease. You have to sterilize your pruning shears between cuts or you will do more damage than good.

Dip the shears into a diluted bleach solution (1 part bleach to 10 parts water) or spray with an aerosol disinfectant to sterilize them. You also have to cut below the visible damage to get all the bacteria. Try to cut 12 inches below in the spring. Next year, you can spray with streptomycin during bloom to keep the insects from carrying the disease around. Don't promote succulent growth with excessive nitrogen fertilizer. Finally, if you plant any more fruit-bearing trees, check with your local Cooperative Extension agent for varieties resistant to fire blight. **David Goforth**

Growing Herbs

Herbs are easy to grow and are a wonderful addition to any landscape or garden. Tuck them into a perennial bed or border, plant in a formal herb garden or incorporate into your vegetable garden. Both beautiful and fragrant, herbs also are widely used in butterfly gardens.

Most herbs prefer full sun and well-drained, fertile soil. Prepare the soil as you would for a vegetable garden, tilling well and incorporating compost or aged manure. For the purpose of soil sampling, lime and nutrient requirements are similar to those for a vegetable or flower garden. Many herbs such as cilantro, dill, basil and parsley can be started easily from seed. It also is easy to find a variety of herbs at most garden centers.

The "Herb of the Year" is *Rosemarinus officinalis*. Rosemary makes a wonderful addition to the garden and has a variety of culinary uses. It is an evergreen perennial in most areas of the state, though it's not reliably hardy in the mountains. It can grow to a height of 3 feet or more and can be cut back in late winter to control size. If you're like me, and never get around to harvesting and using rosemary, it's still a joy to simply brush it as you walk by to enjoy the wonderful burst of aroma it releases! **Paul McKenzie**

ENVIRO-TIP Mulch Benefits

How would you like to use one material in your landscape that improves the aesthetics of your landscape, prevents weeds from sprouting and growing, conserves soil moisture, prevents erosion, helps maintain a more uniform soil temperature and improves the tilth of your soil? You can do all of this by maintaining a 3- to 4-inch layer of organic mulch in your flower and shrubbery beds and by using mulch in natural areas and shady spots where grass has difficulty growing.

Don't be mistaken, mulches cannot eliminate established perennial weeds such as nutgrasses or bermudagrass in flower beds, but by applying and maintaining a 3- to 4-inch layer of mulch over relatively weed-free areas, you can eliminate a lot of back-breaking weeding or use of herbicides.

Choose from a variety of organic as well as inorganic mulches depending on your preference and the area to be mulched. Organic mulches

should either be composted or of a stable nature such as pine needles or pine bark nuggets. Organic materials such as leaves, grass clippings and ground wood chips should be well-composted to avoid a possible nitrogen deficit to your plants. Likewise, use manures and backyard compost as mulch, but only after they have been through a thorough composting process. Use sheet or shredded newspaper as mulch by moistening them and covering with another mulch to keep in place.

Inorganic mulches include gravel of differing sizes, crushed rock, small lava rocks and broken brick pieces. These materials usually are used in a total landscape plan and work well in walkways or as fillers in steps in the garden.

Avoid plastic mulches as they can become entangled in plant roots, take eons to decay and prevent normal oxygen and water exchange for the soil.

Royce Hardin



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Watch Almanac Gardener on UNC-TV Network Stations

12 noon on Saturdays
2:30 p.m. on Sundays



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Garden Spot

Educational State

Forests, operated by the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources, are used to teach the public, especially schoolchildren, about the forest environment. Each of six forests feature self-guided trails that include exhibits, tree identification signs, wildlife information, a forest education center and a talking tree trail. Specially trained rangers are available to conduct classes for school and other youth groups. Every summer, the N.C. Division of Forest Resources offers an environmental education workshop at each forest for teachers and other leaders of youth groups. A visit to these forests is a great family outing opportunity to explore nature.

The Educational State Forests are: Clemmons in Johnston County, Holmes in Henderson County, Jordan Lake in Chatham County, Rendezvous Mountain in Wilkes County, Turnbull Creek in Bladen County and Tuttle in Caldwell County. For more information contact www.dfr.state.nc.us/ or (919) 733-2162.

John MacNair

Gardening in May

Lawns

- Fertilize bermudagrass lawns with 1 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet. Do not fertilize other grasses, especially tall fescue and other cool-season species.
- Mow at the correct height, about 1 inch for warm-season grasses (except St. Augustine), about 3 inches for cool-season grasses. Never cut off more than 50 percent of the height.
- Practice grasscycling. Mow frequently and allow the clippings to remain on the lawn, adding nutrients and organic matter back to the soil.

Ornamentals

- Begin watching for powdery mildew on crape myrtles, dogwoods, euonymous and others. Treat with an approved fungicide only if damage is severe, plant is stressed or plant has exceptional ornamental value.
- Check the output of your irrigation system. Place several tuna cans in the bed and determine how long it takes to apply 1 inch of water. Most plants require about 1 inch of water per week; a bit more is needed in sandy soils.
 - Begin watching for summer annual weeds, especially in the Piedmont and coastal plain, and control early. Weeds are generally easier to control when small.
- **Edibles**
 - Maintain a regular spray program on peaches, apples, pears and nectarines to control insect and disease pests.
 - Plant warm-season vegetables such as beans, sweet corn, cantaloupes, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, southern peas, peppers, pumpkins, summer squash, tomatoes and watermelon.
 - When purchasing transplants, look for stocky, deep green plants. Inspect closely for pests, especially undersides of leaves. **Paul McKenzie**



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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	Craig Mauney	(336)767-8213
Gaston	Ben Dungan	(704)922-9222
Guilford	Karen Neill	(336)375-9222
Henderson	Bill Skelton	(828)697-4891
Lincoln	Kevin Starr	(704)736-8452
Mecklenburg	John MacNair	(704)336-2561
	Emily Revels	(704)336-2561
Nash	Mike Wilder	(252)459-9810
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

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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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