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NC STATE UNIVERSITY

NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES

JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

'Amethyst Falls' Wisteria Offers Elegant Alternative

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isteria is a plant that, for some, evokes images of garden pergolas laden with fragrant, cascading blooms. Mention the plant to gardeners, though, and they can't seem to run fast enough to sharpen their pruning shears! Though those pruning shears are a necessity to keep the Chinese wisteria in check, there is an alternative that offers beauty without the need for constant manicures: 'Amethyst Falls' American wisteria, one of the new JC Raulston Arboretum Selections™.

'Amethyst Falls' is a cultivar of *Wisteria frutescens*, a species that is native in much of the southeastern U.S. It was first released by Bob and Bill Head of Head-Lee Nursery in South Carolina. This deciduous, flowering vine has dark green foliage and a more restrained growth habit than the more familiar Chinese wisteria (*W. sinensis*). While Chinese wisteria has beautiful flowers, most gardeners know that it is extremely aggressive and has become naturalized in many spots in the state. 'Amethyst Falls' produces hanging clusters of lavender-purple flowers which are produced abundantly in the spring and sporadically through the summer.

This cultivar is disease- and insect-resistant and adapts well to a variety of soils, perhaps being bothered occasionally by Japanese beetles. It will flower best when located in full to partial sun. 'Amethyst Falls' is a good choice for small garden settings as a nonvigorous vine grown on an arbor or other small structures. It is hardy in USDA zones 5-9.

'Amethyst Falls' is one of more than a dozen different wisterias in the JC Raulston Arboretum (JCRA) collection. Perhaps the most striking feature of many of the JCRA wisterias is how they've been trained into spiral tree forms. With a center post as their guide and frequent pruning to prevent vigorous, uncontrolled vining, these plants have become contained landscape elements. Check out a listing of the JCRA wisterias at <[www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum](http://www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum)>.

Kevin Starr



all photos  
'Amethyst Falls'

Robert E. Lyons ©

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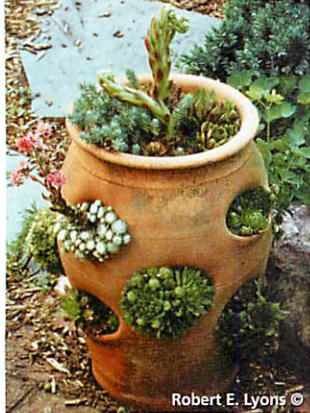
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Garden Spot

TOP AWARDS RECEIVED FROM:

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- National Association of County Agricultural Agents
- Southern Extension Forest Resource Specialists
- N.C. Association of County Agricultural Agents
- Mecklenburg County Priority Awards
- Printing Industry of the Carolinas





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## Container Gardening Opens the Doors for All Gardeners

Developing a residential landscape is often thought of in terms of long sweeping beds, curvilinear spaces carved amongst turf or even raised beds supported by retaining walls or rocky edges. Perhaps, but gardening need not be confined exclusively to these defined areas. Let's face it, we all don't live in similar homes but there is a good chance we share a similar interest in gardening, given its high ranking as one of America's favorite pastimes.

The use of containers to make gardening a reality or enhance more traditional landscapes is growing in popularity. It opens the door for apartment dwellers, townhouse stowaways, condominium inhabitants and anyone else who simply views the driveway as additional uncultivated territory. Container possibilities may take the form of super-sized flower pots, window boxes, the orifice-adorned strawberry jar (terra-cotta, if you please!) and exotic imports from the likes of those marvelous Mediterranean street cafes. As eclectic as any list of container possibilities may be, they should all share at least one thing in common – drainage holes! Don't even think about this technique and your chances for success without them. Container gardens must support the needs of their "occupants," and soggy soil will be a quick road to failure.

Ready-made containers are ubiquitous staples at most garden centers, particularly during the spring rush. They also are becoming more available in the middle of the summer to refresh the color palette in the landscape. Reputable centers use the right planting media along with a sensible combination of plants, meaning that the media will drain well and hold onto sufficient moisture for optimal plant growth and beautiful flowers. Beads of slow-release fertilizer are often added to provide a steady supply of nutrition in a limited volume of soil which becomes deficient rather quickly.

Some plants seem to be "container naturals." They fit in size, habit, ease of flowering and ability to tolerate occasional stress. And while we frequently think of container candidates as being only annuals, there are plenty of perennials well-suited to this type of gardening. Let's take a look at a few of both.

Strawberry jars are perfect containers and come in a wide variety of sizes, and I've always thought them to be tailor-made for perennial sedums and hens-and-chicks (*Sempervivum spp.*). The latter produce their "offspring" rapidly and without encouragement, virtually exploding from their terra-cotta balconies in a couple of years. Capping off the jar with sprawling sedums, like 'Dragons Blood' and the up-and-comer *Sedum tetractinum*, produces a cascading effect.

Half kegs are widely available to transform into a manageable oasis of color for any patio, deck, driveway or front porch. For shadier spots, try caladiums, beloved for their immensely colorful foliage, or impatiens, one of America's most popular bedding plants. For sunny areas, cascading geraniums, "wave" petunias and linear celosia can be striking plants in container presentations. Whatever plants and colors you select, remember, it's your container and it should appeal to you!

For more information on building your own container garden, contact your local Cooperative Extension Center or visit your local garden center horticulturists and they'll be happy to help!

### Robert E. Lyons

*Dr. Robert E. Lyons is Director of the JC Raulston Arboretum and Professor of Horticultural Science at NC State University. His beautiful photography is featured each month in Extension's Successful Gardener.*

## Prepare for Strawberry Season!

Few foods taste better than the first strawberries of the season, particularly those from your own garden or your local pick-your-own farms. If you're interested in growing your own, success depends on close attention to cultural details. Strawberries like full sun. The soil also is crucial. Before you plant, have your soil tested. Free soil test kits are available at your local Cooperative Extension Center and results will provide you with information on the recommended fertilizer and lime amounts.

For transplanting in the spring, temperatures should be 40 to 45 degrees. Keep in mind that strawberries have shallow roots and will need water regularly. The best route to success is to start with disease-free certified plants from a reliable nursery.

When you set out your plants, make sure you leave the crown just above the soil surface. For more information on specific steps for planting and caring for strawberries, contact your county Cooperative Extension Center or access <[www.ncstate-plants.net](http://www.ncstate-plants.net)>. Click on Consumer Hort Leaflets. **Willie Earl Wilson**

## Q&A What are these spots on my rhododendron leaves?

Rhododendrons and many other evergreens have numerous spots on the older foliage at this time of year. You can recognize the older foliage because it is the foliage closest to the stem. If the new growth hasn't started, all the foliage is old foliage. About 50 different fungi can cause these spots. Spraying fungicides can't prevent or cure

these spots. That doesn't matter because these leaves will be falling off in a few weeks anyway. Any spots showing up on the new growth is a different problem. Contact your local Cooperative Extension agent or use the problem diagnostic tool located at <http://cabarrus.ces.state.nc.us/staff/dgoforth/mgdg.html>

**David Goforth**

## CD Program Helps Identify Garden Pests

"Common Insect Pests of the Landscape," a new CD program from NC State University, is designed to help home gardeners learn more about pests and pest management.

The 10 insects featured in the program are commonly found in the North Carolina landscape: aphids, Japanese beetles, azalea lace bugs, spruce spider mites, Southern red mites, boxwood leafminer, bagworms, fall webworms, tea scale and fire ants.

Developed by the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Department of Communication Services and Dr. Steve Bambara, entomologist with N.C. Cooperative Extension, the CD runs on Windows 95/98 or Mac OS 8.0 systems or higher. To order the program, write to Insect Pests CD, Communication Services, NC State University, Box 7603, Raleigh, NC 27695-7603. The cost is \$12 and checks or money orders should be made payable to NC State University.



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Learn about annuals, perennials, lawns, trees and more from Extension horticulture experts and guest lecturers!

**Saturday, March 31 &  
Sunday, April 1**

- 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Noon to 5 p.m., respectively
- Currituck Flower & Garden Show
- Currituck County High School, Barco
- Details: (252) 232-2262

**Saturday, April 21**

- 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., various times
- Southern Ideal Home Show
- State Fairgrounds, Raleigh
- Details: (919) 560-0525

## ENVIRO-TIP

### Choose the Right Type of Fertilizer

If you have ever walked into a garden center looking for fertilizer, you may well have been overwhelmed by the choices. There's 10-10-10, 12-4-8, 33-3-3, natural, organic, synthetic, slow-release, time-release, water-soluble and products made specifically for one type or group of plants. What do you use?

In order to be called a fertilizer, the material is required to have its analysis on the label, which is listed in number ratios such as 10-10-10. These numbers simply represent the percentage by weight of the macro nutrients – nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium, respectively. Once you get past those numbers, then you have several other choices you can make.

Slow-release or time-release fertilizers are just what their name implies. The nutrients are released over time. Environmentally, this is really the ideal situation for the plant, being

spoon-fed over a period of several months. Water-soluble fertilizers, on the other hand, are readily available as soon as they are applied, and much more likely to be moved in water that is running off your yard or garden.

The synthetic fertilizers are derived from non-living sources and usually cheaper than the natural fertilizers, which are derived from an organic source. Many organic materials are sold as soil amendments instead of fertilizer because nutrient content in these materials is often variable.

Whatever type of fertilizer material you choose to use, you will also need to know how much you need. The only way to know this is to take a soil test. Soil test boxes and forms can be picked up at your county Cooperative Extension Center.

**Bill Skelton**



Ornamental Onion

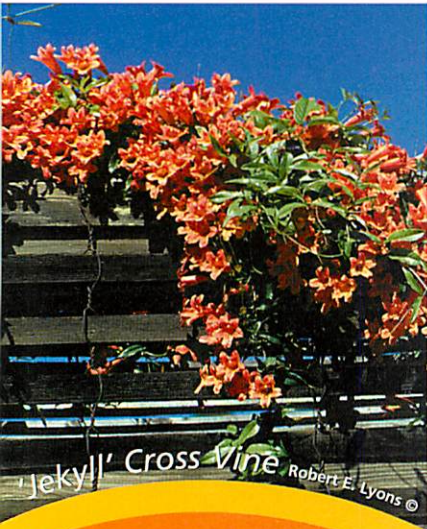


gardentalk



"The tiniest garden is often the loveliest."

– Vita Sackville-West



Garden Spot

**The Cape Fear Botanical Garden**, located along the bluffs of the Cape Fear River, is a relatively young garden, getting its start in 1989 when the city of Fayetteville donated the land for a public garden. The gardens, planted primarily with native plants, are beautiful year-round. One of the main attractions in this 85-acre garden is the woodland rim walk. A half-mile trail winds through an oak forest. Steep ravines shelter unusual plants while beds of perennials and annuals abound for the colorful display in summer. Native plants supply the rest of the garden with lots of interest. There is a picturesque garden gazebo, a natural amphitheater as well as an 1886 farmhouse where pioneer farm life can be studied.

The garden, located at 536 N. Eastern Boulevard in Fayetteville, is open Mondays through Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Sundays from noon to 5 p.m. The fee is \$3. Call (910) 486-0221 or access <[www.capefearbg.org](http://www.capefearbg.org)>.

*Karen Neill*

## Gardening in April

### Lawns

- Identify and control broadleaf weeds.
- Do not fertilize cool-season grasses such as tall fescue; fertilizing at this time of year increases disease risks.
- Wait until the grass turns green to fertilize warm-season grasses such as Bermuda and zoysia.
- Sharpen lawn mower blades; do not cut more than one-third of the grass blade. Leave nutrient-rich clippings on the lawn.

### Ornamentals

- Prepare new flower beds. Although it is too early to plant in some regions of the state, it isn't too early to till, incorporate organic matter, lime and fertilizer.
  - Redefine edges of plant borders. Use a flat blade shovel and trench out about 2 to 3 inches deep and 5 to 6 inches wide all around the beds. Add mulch, letting the trench be the border. This fresh, crisp line will accentuate the grass and the bed.
    - After the petals fade and fall off bulbs, remove flower organs with scissors or hand pruners, and allow the foliage to die a natural death.

### Edibles

- Buy the best quality seed you can obtain since it is the least expensive component of gardening.
  - Contact your Cooperative Extension Center for publication AG 12, a vegetable crops guide.
- Thin cool-season vegetables, particularly root crops such as carrots and onions.
  - After the last frost, sow seeds for beans, corn and cucumbers.
- Plant strawberries and blueberries.
- Avoid purchasing tomato and pepper transplants that are already in bloom.

*David Barkley*



Extension's *Successful Gardener*<sup>SM</sup> program provides timely, research-based horticultural information. The newsletter is part of the statewide horticulture program which includes Extension's *Successful Gardener*<sup>SM</sup> Regional Seminar Series and county workshops. We publish 10 issues per year. Comments concerning *Successful Gardener*<sup>SM</sup> may be sent to:

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