

JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

Witchhazel: The Gardener's Missing (Winter) Link

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

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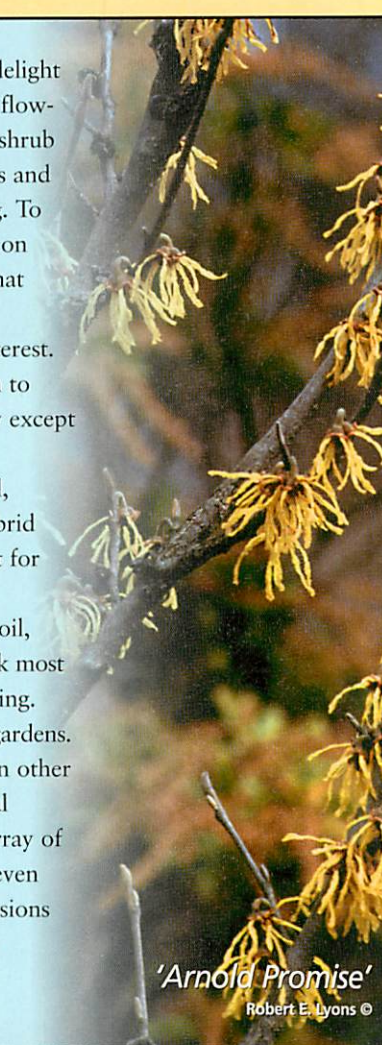
hile most plants are hibernating for the winter, witchhazels delight the senses with a tantalizing array of delicate, often fragrant flowers. A wonderful winter accent, this small- to medium-sized shrub complements other plantings in the landscape. Depending on the species and the named variety, witchhazels bloom from late fall through early spring. To cope with blustery weather, their flower petals curl up and then reopen on warmer, sunny days. The flowers, which have thread-like petals somewhat akin to bee balm, vary in color from tinges of yellow to red to orange.

The leaves resemble hazelnut and the fruit provide further winter interest. They are upright, loosely branched shrubs or small trees and need room to branch out – 10 to 15 feet in height and width. Pruning is not necessary except for infrequent shaping.

If you prefer natives, *Hamamelis virginiana*, which blooms in the fall, and *Hamamelis vernalis*, which blooms in late winter, are available. Hybrid cultivars such as 'Arnold Promise', 'Ruby Glow' and 'Primavera' are best for consistent flowering, scent and fall color.

The edge of a natural area or a mixed shrub border with improved soil, good drainage and occasional irrigation is ideal for these plants. They look most attractive when used to heighten areas of a garden that already are inviting. They're perfect for established landscapes, especially historic homes and gardens.

The witchhazels in the JC Raulston Arboretum Winter Garden and in other areas of the east JCRA will surprise you with their incredible ornamental displays at the most unexpected times. You can see a dazzling cultivar array of native species, study cultivars from the Chinese species, *H. mollis*, and even smile at the weeping form, 'Lombart's Weeping'. Search the JCRA accessions database at www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum for a complete listing by clicking on "Horticulture" then "Current Plantings." **John MacNair**



'Arnold Promise'
Robert E. Lyons ©

inside

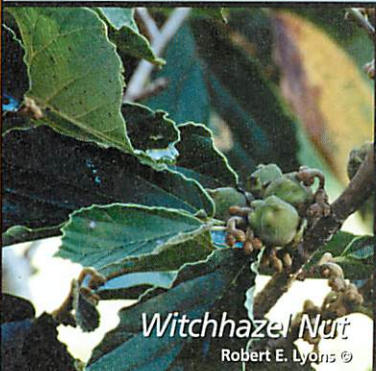
2 Invite Nature Into Your Backyard

3 Enviro-Tip

4 Garden Spot

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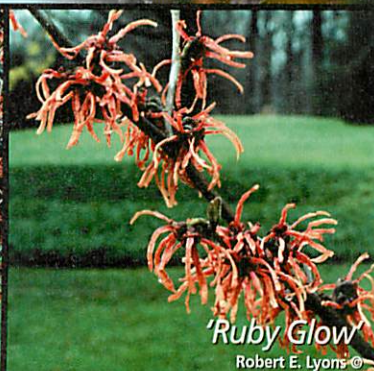
- International Association of Business Communicators
- National Association of County Agricultural Agents
- Southern Extension Forest Resource Specialists
- N.C. Association of County Agricultural Agents
- Mecklenburg County Priority Awards
- Printing Industry of the Carolinas



Witchhazel Nut
Robert E. Lyons ©



'Ruby Glow'
Robert E. Lyons ©



'Ruby Glow'
Robert E. Lyons ©



Robert E. Lyons ©

Newly Hatched Robins



Robert E. Lyons ©

Viburnum Fruit

Invite Nature Into Your Backyard

The beauty of a landscape comes alive with birds, butterflies and other wildlife. And as many regions of our state become more urban, backyards can be important homes for many different types of birds, butterflies, bats, beneficial insects, reptiles, amphibians and other wildlife. Trees, shrubs and other plants provide food and shelter, and the wildlife you attract depends on the plant types in your yard. Plant a variety of plant species and consider using native plants if appropriate. Select plants that flower and fruit at different times of the year to keep wildlife continually visiting your yard. Select trees and shrubs with berries, nuts or fruit to provide seasonal food. Many flowers attract butterflies or hummingbirds. Birdhouses and feeders also help attract our feathered friends and bat houses attract the best controller of night-flying insects.

Food and cover are essential for birds. Some trees that will attract birds include American holly, black gum, flowering dogwood and oaks. Shrubs for birds include junipers, blueberries, hollies, viburnums and wax myrtles. Vines that attract birds include trumpet honeysuckle, trumpet creeper, Virginia creeper and muscadine grapes. Since different species of birds have different requirements for nesting and food, it is important to do a little research about the birds found in your area and what they prefer to eat.

Butterflies and moths add a great deal of interest to your backyard. There are hundreds of different types of butterflies and moths and they are very particular about their food. Both are insects whose eggs hatch into larvae or caterpillars. Caterpillars grow and eventually go into a resting stage or pupae. The adult butterfly emerges from the pupa. Because of these varied life stages, you must tolerate damage from the caterpillars in order to have adult butterflies and moths in the garden. The caterpillars feed on the foliage of various plants. Butterflies feed on the nectar of flowers. Since these animals are insects it

is important to limit the use of insecticides in a garden where you are encouraging *them*.

Bees are also an important insect to have in the garden. Bees do a great amount of pollinating in any garden. They also are sensitive to many insecticides so careful use is important.

Bats eat many night-flying insects such as mosquitoes, moths and beetles. A single brown bat can catch up to 600 mosquitoes in an hour. Placing a bat house at least 15 feet high on a pole that receives at least 6 hours of sunlight a day will help attract bats to your yard.

Toads, frogs, lizards, turtles and snakes all have a place in backyards. Many people are afraid of these reptiles and amphibians, but they feed on many destructive insects and rodents. Since these are cold-blooded animals, they need a sunny spot to warm up in the morning and shady spots to shelter them in the heat of the day. Rocks piled in the sun will provide an excellent basking spot, while shade-tolerant groundcovers provide a cool shelter.

Water is important to many species of wildlife. Place water in saucers, birdbaths or a backyard pond. Remember to replace water in small containers every few days to keep it fresh.

While attracting the beneficial types of wildlife discussed here, *you may attract* some unwanted guests as well.

Squirrels, chipmunks, rabbits, raccoons, opossums, mice and deer are all common in urban environments. In some cases, they can become a nuisance. If this happens to occur, try to be patient and share space with these animals if at all possible.

Danny Lauderdale



Planning for Visitors

Attract wildlife by making sure food, water, shelter and space are available. Trees and shrubs are the bones of any landscape design. They also are important for wildlife shelter. Consider these steps to create a wildlife habitat.

1. Identify all existing plants, noting condition, location, shade, whether they are evergreen or deciduous, whether they provide food.
2. Make a sketch of your yard showing all existing buildings, walkways, driveway and utilities.
3. Add trees, shrubs, flowers and groundcovers to your plan. Include those existing that will remain and locations of future plants.
4. Plant any trees needed first.
5. Follow with understory trees and shrubs.
6. Add flowering annuals and perennials for color. Select plants that will attract birds, bees and butterflies.

To learn more, access www.ces.ncsu.edu/nreos/forest/steward/catalog2.html for the Cooperative Extension Forestry "Working with Wildlife" Series

Q&A Why does my poinsettia from last year have small leaves, long stems and no color?

First, congratulations on keeping the plant alive.

Poinsettias are a moderately difficult houseplant. Most homeowners don't provide the warm temperatures and sunny spot the poinsettia prefers. During the growing season, you have to protect them from drafts while keeping them evenly watered. The leaves look small because you are comparing them with the superb plant grown by professional growers. Your leaves are probably typical. The long stems indicate you haven't pruned it right. When the colorful bracts (we think of them as flowers)

fall, set the plant in a cool place with dry soil until you see new growth. Cut the plant back to 6 inches and water. As the plant grows, pinch back to keep the stems shorter. Finally, the lack of color indicates your poinsettia hasn't had enough 14-hour nights of total darkness. In North Carolina this should happen in time for February color. Some newer cultivars will color up earlier. A person with nothing better to do can get color by Christmas if they provided 14 hours of darkness starting in October.

David Goforth

ENVIRO-TIP

Extend Use of Your Christmas Tree

The packages are opened, the gifts put away. The lights, tinsel and ornaments have all been packed for the year. All that is left is the tired-looking fraser fir that used to be your Christmas tree.

Well, you are in luck. Your Christmas tree has uses after the holiday season. It can be placed in the garden or backyard to be used as a bird feeder. Suspend bird seed cones, orange slices, bread and other food sources that may attract birds. The color that used to be provided by the lights and ornaments will now be brightly colored birds.



Also, remember your tree is biodegradable. Its branches and trunk may be chipped and placed in the compost pile and processed into part of the compost that is later added to the garden soil. Many cities, towns and counties have their own Christmas tree chipping sites where you can drop off your tree to be turned into mulch or compost. Check with your county Cooperative Extension Center for locations in your area.

Don't just throw your Christmas tree away, use it again in a very beneficial way. *Bill Skelton*



Learn more about planting Trees of Strength in remembrance of those who died Sept. 11 and in honor of those who protect and defend our country. Contact your county Cooperative Extension Center or access www.treesofstrength.org.

Announcing Extension's



► Saturday, February 16

- 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- Citizens Resource Center, Dallas
- Speakers: Bob Polomski, Deward Clark, Kevin Starr, Chris Moorman, Ron Ballard
- Fee: \$4 advance, \$6 at door
- Details: (704) 922-2110

► Sunday, February 24

- 1 to 5 p.m.
- Southern Spring Show, Charlotte Merchandise Mart
- Fee: Show admission
- Details: (704) 336-2561

► Saturday, March 9

- 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. (every other hour on Home Improvement Stage)
- Southern Ideal Home Show, Greensboro Coliseum
- Fee: Show admission
- Details: (704) 375-5876

Other Learning Opportunities

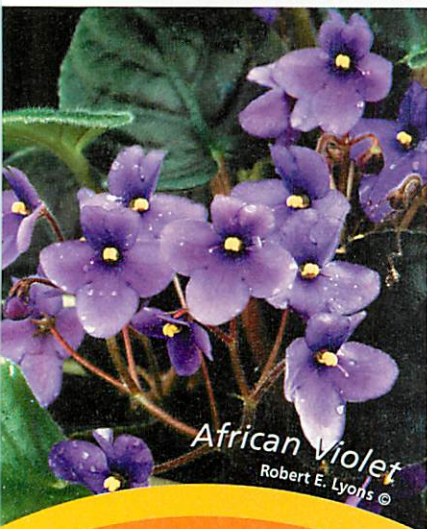
- **January 15** – Extension Master Gardener Training in Union County begins
 - Meets each Tuesday until April 16
 - 9 a.m. to Noon
 - Cooperative Extension Center, Union County Courthouse
 - Details: (704) 283-3741

gardentalk



“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.”

– Rachel Carson



African Violet
Robert E. Lyons ©

The Orton Plantation Gardens,

located on the Cape Fear River in Winnabow, feature camellias, azaleas, rhododendrons, other shrubs and a wide variety of ornamentals on 20 acres.

A sandy drive through a canopy of live oaks takes you back into the past of this plantation's original rice farming operation. Although rice is not currently grown, the fields are still flooded each winter to provide food and shelter for wildlife. The plantation house is a private residence and not open to the public.

Formal and informal gardens, along with majestic oaks and native plants, are of great appeal to visitors. They have been used extensively for television shows and movies.

Though the gardens are closed December through February, add them to your list of must-visit gardens for next spring. In the meantime, learn more about their history and what they have to offer at www.ortongardens.com/ or call (910) 371-6851. They are located at 9149 Orton Road, 18 miles south of Wilmington.

Cyndi Lauderdale

Gardening in December

Lawns

- If you did not get around to the fall fertilization of cool-season lawns such as fescue, it can still be done. The roots of cool-season grasses continue to grow whenever the ground is not frozen.
- If necessary, use broadleaf herbicide to spot-treat winter weeds in established fescue or bluegrass, or dormant zoysia or Bermuda lawns that have not been overseeded.

Ornamentals

- In areas where the ground may freeze, water evergreen shrubs before the ground freezes to reduce leaf scorching.
- Many landscape shrubs can be propagated from hardwood cuttings, including American holly and junipers. Refer to Horticulture Information Leaflet 8702, available from your Cooperative Extension Center.

- Use care when cutting holiday greenery from landscape plants. Use sharp pruners to make cuts above a bud or side branch and keep an eye on the overall shape of the plant.
- Check holiday plants and gift plants for insects before locating them near your other plants.

- Keep the poinsettia healthy by watering regularly and keeping the plant out of drafts.

Edibles

- Mulch strawberry beds with straw after the plants are dormant, when night temperatures regularly reach into the 20s.
- Prune grapevines now. Consider using the vines for wreathmaking.
- Do not prune fruit trees.

Gift Idea

- If you know a gardener who can no longer do all of his or her own garden work, a nice holiday gift is a "certificate" offering your services to haul mulch, till the garden or plant flowers. *Linda Blue*



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

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For a list of garden centers where you can find *Successful Gardener*SM, please call (704)336-2561 or visit Cooperative Extension on the web at <http://www.cees.ncsu.edu>

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