

JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

New Sweet Potatoes Add Ornamental Flavor

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

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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

The sweet potato, *Ipomoea batatas*, a tropical root and member of the morning glory family, has taken the landscape industry by storm. Adding another dimension to a plant traditionally associated with a food we welcome on North Carolina tables, the ornamental sweet potato is popular for its decorative foliage and vigorous growth habit which provide an appealing plant choice for mixed containers or as a groundcover.

Like so many plants from tropical regions, sweet potatoes like it hot. They need full sun and constant moisture. Plant after danger of frost has passed and watch them take off when the soil temperature begins to warm.

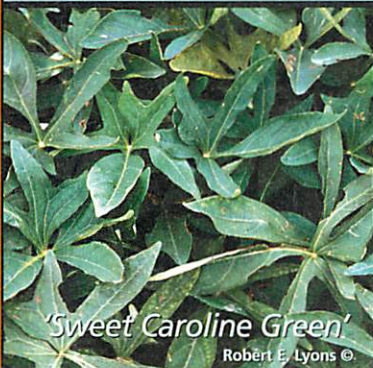
Look for three main cultivars: 'Blackie', with purple, almost black, foliage and deeply cut leaves; 'Marguerite' ('Sulfur') with its chartreuse lime-green foliage, and 'Tricolor' ('Pink Frost') with shades of pink, green and white marbled in the same leaf. While they do not flower often, they enhance mixed plantings with shrubs, herbaceous perennials and flowering annuals.

Perhaps most exciting is the 2002 release of four new patented cultivars developed by NC State University researchers in cooperation with the JC Raulston Arboretum (JCRA). The "Sweet Caroline" series names each new cultivar by its color and is characterized by a compact growth habit and reduced root size, which makes them better suited than existing cultivars to containers and landscape gardens. They offer all the colors currently available plus the uniquely hued 'Sweet Caroline Bronze'. The latter is coppery-bronze in appearance, especially as the leaves age, and has deeper-, contrasting-colored veins in its leaves.

Gardeners should contact their favorite garden center for availability, whereas retailers should contact Bodger Botanicals for stocking information. In this first-time partnership, a portion of the "Sweet Caroline" royalties will benefit the JCRA. Learn more at [www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum](http://www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum). **Karen Neill**



'Sweet Caroline Bronze'  
Robert E. Lyons ©



'Sweet Caroline Green'  
Robert E. Lyons ©



'Sweet Caroline Light Green'  
Robert E. Lyons ©



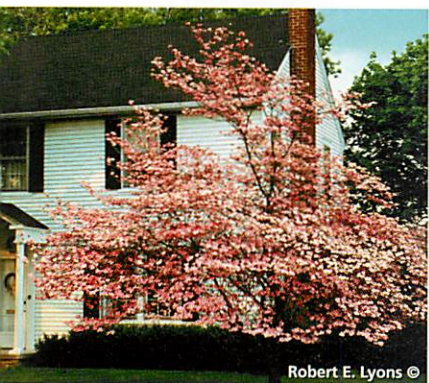
'Sweet Caroline Purple'  
Robert E. Lyons ©





Robert E. Lyons ©

Norway Maple



Robert E. Lyons ©

Pink Dogwood



Robert E. Lyons ©

Cut-leaf Beech

## Tree Selection Guide: What You Need to Consider

Many North Carolinians will plant a tree on March 15 to celebrate Arbor Day. Now in its 130th year, Arbor Day recognizes the value and importance of trees. Without question, a tall tree is aesthetically pleasing to the eye, but trees do much more than offer beauty. They act as air filters, cleaning the air we breathe on a daily basis. Trees also can translate into a monetary value. Strategically located trees near our homes can considerably lower cooling costs in the summer months. They also can increase your property value.

Consider the following when deciding which tree is right for your landscape.

### **What do you want the tree to provide?**

Matching your wants with the tree's capabilities will be important. If you wish to add beauty to the landscape, you may want to pick a tree that has a nice floral display or dazzling fall color. Trees with a floral display include crape myrtle, dogwood, Japanese flowering apricot, Carolina silverbell, flowering crabapple and cherry. Trees with fall color include ginkgo, sourwood, red maple and poplar. However, there are trees that can also do other things such as provide shade, hide ugly views, act as a windbreak, or even control erosion problems.

### **Will the tree interfere with anything where it is?**

Always begin with the end in mind. The tree you plant today will certainly not look like the one you see tomorrow. All large trees should be at least 30 feet away from foundations. Give large-canopy trees plenty of room. The location you choose today may cause structural problems for the tree later. Overhead wires, underground cables, sewers

and basements can pose problems in the long term if not addressed early on.

**How long will it take for the tree to reach its full size?** Growth rates on trees vary with the species. Trees with a very fast growth rate such as willow oaks, willows and Bradford pears tend to be more brittle and fragile, especially when exposed to heavy winds and snowstorms. Moderate to slower growing trees are more structurally sound, yet take a longer time to reach their full size.

**What are the physical characteristics of the tree?** Do you find yourself hating to rake leaves every year? Then you may want to stay away from the trees that drop their leaves every fall. If you have children that play in your yard, you may want a good climbing tree. A black gum may provide ample shade and exceptional fall color, but do you want to always step on the "gum balls" that drop year after year?

**Will the tree grow where I live?** Always make sure the tree you choose will grow and survive in your area. Check the hardiness of the tree by seeing what zones it will grow in successfully. In North Carolina, we have three zones: Zone 6 in the northwestern section or Mountains, Zone 7 in the Piedmont and Zone 8 in the Coastal areas. Extreme summer heat or severe winters can be the death of a tree if planted in the wrong area.

**Ben Dungan**

### **Helpful Web Sites**

[www.ncstate-plants.net](http://www.ncstate-plants.net) | [www.arborday.org](http://www.arborday.org)  
[www.treesofstrength.org](http://www.treesofstrength.org)

## Extend the Beauty of Spring-Flowering Bulbs

Have you ever noticed that spring-flowering bulbs are like gardeners? In late winter they start in a blaze of glory. They work hard during the spring. Then they go inside and sit under the air conditioner the rest of the summer. Actually, spring-flowering bulbs can't sit under the air conditioner, but they do avoid the hot, dry summer by going dormant. With care and a little luck, gardeners and bulbs come back next year ready to go again.

Care for spring-flowering bulbs by fertilizing properly, watering and allowing the foliage to die naturally. Bulbs need nitrogen

in the fall and again when the foliage emerges. The foliage normally emerges six to eight weeks before the bloom. A slow-release fertilizer in the fall will provide enough nitrogen. If you didn't use slow-release, use 3 pounds of 10-10-10 per 100 square feet, or an equivalent amount, when the foliage emerges. Don't fertilize within six weeks of flowering. Late fertilization won't help the plant and may even increase fungal diseases. Keep the pH over 6 for best growth. You can lime anytime.

Spring-flowering bulbs can use a lot of water from bloom time until the leaves die.

Remember the roots may be 6 inches deep. Water doesn't help them unless it gets down there.

Keep the foliage intact and healthy for maximum energy storage. When the foliage fades, remove it by cutting or gently pulling. **David Goforth**



Robert E. Lyons ©

Summer Snowflake



## Q&A Is it time to prune my shrubs?

Spring-flowering shrubs such as azaleas and forsythias

that bloom on last season's growth should be pruned soon after bloom. This will allow for vigorous growth in the summer and more flower buds for next year. Shrubs that bloom in the summer such as roses usually flower from buds formed the same spring. These shrubs should be pruned in late winter to promote more growth in the spring. For evergreen shrubs, thinning is the most desirable method of pruning. Some evergreens can be sheared when a stiff, formal appearance is needed; however,

they will still need to be thinned now and then. Evergreen and deciduous shrubs grown for foliage should be pruned in late winter or early spring, before new growth starts. Minor corrective pruning can be done any time of the year.

A properly pruned shrub is a work of art and does not look as if it has been pruned. And it certainly doesn't need the topped or chopped look. Extreme pruning practices are all too common and are very stressful to the plant. To learn more about proper pruning techniques, visit [www.ncstate-plants.net](http://www.ncstate-plants.net).

**Amy Lynn Bartel**

## ENVIRO-TIP

### Remember the Bee in Beneficial

Whenever anyone mentions bees, the first reaction usually is to the thought of the painful stings these small creatures can deliver. Bees, wasps and their relatives are well known for painful stings and causing allergic reactions, but they also are beneficial insects.

Honeybees play a major role as pollinators for vegetable, fruit and ornamental crop production. Honey, the natural byproduct, is a food staple in many parts of the world. Most people are familiar with honeybees and their contribution in food production and pollination, but few are aware that these insects and their cousins not only pollinate but also are predators of insect pests.

A large number of bees and wasps from several families prey on insect pests. Hornets feed on a variety of insects including yellow jackets. Some attack small insects such as aphids. Others live in the eggs of various pest insects. Larger parasite wasps attack caterpillars or wood-boring beetles. Hunting bees and

wasps can be important in controlling garden insect pests. For example, the common *Polistes* paper wasps, when hunting, may thoroughly search plants and feed on caterpillars, often providing substantial control of insects.

The greenhouse poinsettia and tomato industries in North Carolina employ a small parasitic wasp, *Encarsia formosa*, which controls whiteflies. The small insect enables a grower to produce a viable crop without the use of chemical insecticides.

The next time a bee buzzes your head in the garden, reconsider taking that swat at it. It may be trying to help by making a meal of the bugs eating your vegetables. To learn more about bees and beekeeping, go to [www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/Bees/](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/Bees/).

**Darrell Blackwelder**



### gardentalk

"The best friend on earth of man is the tree. When we use the tree respectfully and economically, we have one of the greatest resources of the earth."

— Frank Lloyd Wright

Announcing

Extension's



► 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: (336) 375-5876

► Saturday, March 16 (South Campus) or Saturday, March 27 (North Campus)

- 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.
- Central Piedmont Community College (note date and campus)
- Topic: Pesticide Safety for the Gardener
- Fee: Free, but must preregister
- Register: (704) 330-4223

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*Spirea*  
Robert E. Lyons ©

### Memorial Gardens,

a 200-year-old cemetery in Concord, attracts visitors from several states around Easter when nearly 100 varieties of azaleas and 15,000 tulips bloom. Since the date for Easter varies from year to year, the garden features different tulip cultivars in order to have blooms over a longer period. Within the three-acre site, a variety of recently introduced plants such as *Prunus mume* and Natchez crape myrtle are interspersed through stately hundred-year-old oaks and hollies. Several perennial beds provide year-round interest.

Fountains, a rose garden, a waterfall, a goldfish pond and intricately carved white Italian marble markers are sprinkled over the gently sloping hillside.

Memorial Gardens is open Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 1 to 5:30 p.m. There is no admission charge and guided group tours are sometimes available. Park on Spring Street or the adjacent parking area (50 Spring Street South). For more information, call (704) 786-8009.

David Goforth

## Gardening in March

### Lawns

- Apply preemergent herbicide for crabgrass control before dogwoods bloom.
- Prepare and calibrate irrigation systems to deliver one inch of water during dry months.
- Scout for weed problems and identify them to select correct herbicide.
- Reseed bare spots of your cool-weather grasses such as fescues.
- Begin aerating and dethatching warm-season lawns such as Bermuda, centipede and zoysia before the grass greens up.

### Ornamentals

- Prune spring-flowering plants such as forsythia, spirea, winter honeysuckle and flowering quince as the flowers fade.
  - Apply preemergent herbicide to flowers and groundcover beds.
- Apply slow-release fertilizer to flowers and shrubs to feed them through the summer.
  - Prune roses early in the month.
    - Start your rose spray program just prior to bud break. Spray roses for black spot every 7 to 10 days.
      - Watch for the webs of the Eastern tent caterpillar to develop in branch crotches; control by breaking open the nest and spraying with Dipel.

### Edibles

- Plant blueberries, grapevines and fruit trees before the buds break.
  - Fertilize asparagus early in March before spear growth begins.
  - Protect strawberry blooms from late frosts by covering with sheets of cloth or plastic.
  - Spray your apple and pear trees with streptomycin for control of fire blight.

Karen Neill



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