

Successful Gardener



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

NC STATE UNIVERSITY NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES

JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

Delightful Dahlias Deliver Big Impact

Dahlias are the darlings of the late summer garden. Visit any county or state fair in the autumn and you likely will find dozens of dahlias. The array of flower colors, sizes and shapes is astounding.

The American Dahlia Society now recognizes 18 classifications of flower form and 15 different colors or color combinations.

Dahlias are available in almost any color: white, shades of pink, red, yellow, orange, shades of purple and various combinations of these colors. Some of the flower forms are truly amazing, from the charming single, daisy-like flowers to the popular double varieties which can range from the 2-inch pompons to 12 inches across. Some of the most spectacular are the peony and cactus forms.

Any garden with fertile, well-drained soil and lots of sun can become a home to dahlias. Since all garden dahlias are hybrids, they are most often planted as tuberous roots. Seeds are available for mixed, small-flowered types. Plant the tuberous roots or plants about the time of the last frost date. Varieties that get taller than 2 feet may need stakes or other supports.

Dahlias may languish during the heat of summer, but keep them mulched and provide plenty of water and they will reward you with a show from late summer through fall.

The tuberous roots will not survive the winter in the ground in most of the Piedmont region and the western part of the state, so those of us in these regions must be prepared to dig roots in the fall to store during the winter. The dahlia is hardy in the Raleigh area and east to the Coast.

Each year, the JC Raulston Arboretum (JCRA) devotes one of the annual trial beds to a single plant that has lots of cultivars. This year will be the season of the dahlia! Visit the JCRA this summer to view over 25 different types, from dwarfs to tall and from green leaves to red leaf forms, each with a character all its own. The dahlia is a wonderful ornamental plant high in color value. Learn more at www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum. *Linda Blue*



'Bishop of Llandaff'
Robert E. Lyons ©

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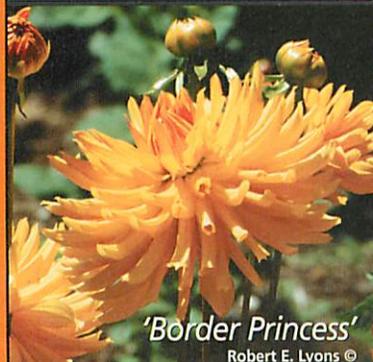
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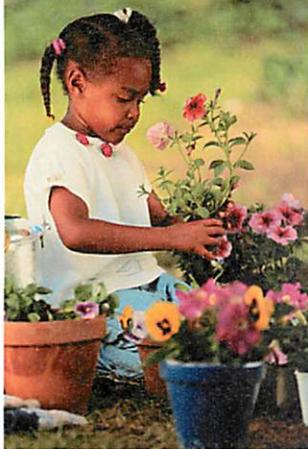
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gardentalk

"Come forth into the light of things, let nature be your teacher."

– William Wordsworth

Gardening Fun For Kids

School is out! Yeah! But what do the kids do for the next three months before school bells are ringing again? How about helping your child plan and plant a garden?

Most young children like to help adults regardless of whether they are in a kitchen, a garden or workshop. Tap into that natural curiosity of children and help them grow an interest in the world of gardening. Encourage your children to discover the excitement of seeing plants emerge from seeds they have sown. Before children start any gardening project, make sure they realize the plants will need care. Emphasize that these plants are depending on them. This gives children a sense of responsibility and importance. Allow them to select the seeds. Give them a choice of easy-to-grow flowers such as marigolds, zinnias or sunflowers, or easy, interesting vegetables such as lettuces or radishes if space is limited. If you have space to work with, consider scarlet runner beans, Big Max pumpkins or Atlantic Giant pumpkins. Whatever the selection, encourage your children in their gardening efforts. Help them plant and care for the



plants. Don't allow them to try to grow too much or plant care will become a dreaded chore, not an enjoyable pastime. No matter if it's a plot or a pot, and no matter if it's filled with flowers or food, a child's own garden becomes a special spot that he or she is responsible for.

Suggest keeping a log of their activity. It could be called "A Biography of My Garden." Help children set up a schedule of care; include weeding and watering for the entire growing season. At first harvest, celebrate by having a taste test if it's a food product. If it is a flower, use it to decorate the table. After flowers or vegetables have grown and been picked, the children may want to continue these projects.

Consider enrolling them in a 4-H club where these projects can be pursued further. Some counties have a Junior Master Gardener program or Extension's *Successful Gardener Kids*. Contact your local Cooperative Extension Center and ask to speak to the 4-H agent. **Karen Neill**



Tips For Getting Your Child Into Gardening

- A picture is worth a thousand words. Never tell kids something you could show them.
- Young kids have a very short attention span. Make sure that you have lots of options available so they can get started immediately and stay busy. Digging holes is one thing that seems to hold endless fascination.
- Instant gratification helps a lot. Plant radishes even if you don't like them; they come up in three or four days.
- Growing their own vegetables will generally get kids to try eating things they otherwise wouldn't consider.
- Let your children play in the dirt when they plant; getting dirty is an integral part of growing up.
- After an activity, do something to reinforce what your children have learned. Talk about what went on, who did what, who saw what. If you can, have them write things down or draw pictures. If they're too young, take dictation.
- Try to add responsibility and ownership to projects. ("Quincy is in charge of the wheelbarrow today.") Try pairing up older kids with younger ones. Be assured that if you give them a healthy respect for gardens and green things when they are young, it will stay with them throughout their lives.

Source: American Community Garden Association

Q&A What is this growth on my azalea leaves?

This is probably an azalea leaf gall.

The leaf gall fungus infects new leaves in the spring. They become thickened, curled, fleshy and pale green to white. Then, a white powdery substance covers one surface. Eventually the gall turns brown or black. The disease alarms gardeners but doesn't bother the plant. Even highly susceptible cultivars don't murmur or whine about this disease. The amount of disease each year depends on environmental conditions, so it may not show up next year

even if you do nothing. Handpicking or pruning diseased leaves in April or early May will make the gardener feel better. It also improves the look of the plant and reduces the source of the disease in future years. Leaf gall seldom causes enough damage to justify spraying a fungicide. By the time you see it, the infection has already occurred. Spraying has to be done as soon as the leaves come out. Rhododendrons get the same disease. Camellia sasanqua, horse-sugar and other plants get related diseases on their shoots and leaves. *David Goforth*

Try Blueberries for Taste and Beauty

Interested in growing fruit in your backyard but the thought of spraying and pruning is a major turn off? Then blueberries may be just the crop for you. Blueberries can be grown with little, if any, pesticides. They do need some pruning but nothing close to what fruit trees require. Plus, they deliver a double bonus of white flowers in the spring and colorful foliage in the fall.

While blueberries are low-maintenance for a fruit crop, there are some keys to success. Remember that blueberries are in the same family with azaleas and they like similar soil conditions. That means an acidic soil with lots of organic matter and good drainage. Unlike azaleas, they need to be planted in full sun.

Choose varieties that are well-suited to your area of the state. Rabbiteye varieties are most widely adapted in the Piedmont although some highbush types are grown. Either type may be grown in the Coastal Plain. The highbush varieties are recommended for the Mountains. Check with your county Cooperative Extension agent for local variety recommendations.

Kevin Starr

ENVIRO-TIP

Plants and Ozone

Ozone. O₃. You can't see it or taste it. When it's high above Earth, this invisible gas absorbs the sun's rays and protects us. Near the Earth's surface, however, ozone is harmful. The main ingredient in smog, ozone is the most damaging air pollutant and can damage human lungs. We aren't the only living things that suffer from ozone pollution. Some trees, crops and ornamentals are more sensitive than others. Crabapple, English walnut, cotton, soybean and althaea are examples.

Ozone damages plants when it enters through natural openings such as stomates and reacts within leaf tissues to inhibit photosynthesis. Acute damage levels can be high enough to cause sudden tissue damage and death. Chronic damage does not initially cause tissue death, but inhibits leaf functions. Ozone symptoms usually occur between the veins on the upper leaf surface of older and middle-aged leaves. Flecks (tiny, light-tan irregular spots), stipples (small, darkly pigmented areas), bronzing and reddening are classic responses to ambient levels of O₃. Another common symptom is bleaching of the upper leaf surface. Damage to conifers

causes browning at the same point on all needles in a needle cluster. What makes diagnosis tricky is that symptoms similar to those caused by ozone can be the result of nutritional deficiencies, drought or other stresses.

Ozone originates chiefly from gasoline engines and burning of other fossil fuels. It is transported by regional weather patterns. Polluted air can come from as far away as the Ohio Valley area and settle over the coast of North Carolina. This classifies it as a nonpoint-source pollutant. Concentrations of O₃ in the Southeast are higher than in most areas of the U.S. They are high here because of transport from urban areas and frequent periods of bright sunshine.

How do you avoid ozone plant damage? Since limiting atmospheric pollutants is difficult for the individual to do, the use of resistant plants is a practical alternative. A few tolerant species in the landscape are white flowering dogwood, ginkgo and red oak. Help existing plants remain healthy by providing adequate fertilization and irrigation, which affords them some protection from air pollution damage. *Mike Wilder*



Robert E. Lyons ©

Crabapple





Asiatic Lily
Robert E. Lyons ©

Garden Spot

The Elizabethan Gardens, located in Manteo, feature abundant bulbs, annuals, herbs, lilies, hydrangeas, azaleas, dogwoods, gardenias, roses and magnolias. The Garden Club of North Carolina, as a living memorial to the Lost Colony, created the gardens in the early 1950s. The gardens are on the site of the first English colony in the New World.

The gardens have a wide variety of native and introduced plant materials. Formal and informal English garden elements give this garden its unique charm. Highlights include a Sunken Garden, the Queen's Rose Garden, an ancient live oak and collections of camellias.

The garden is bordered by the Roanoke Sound and offers blooming plants year-round although the spring bloom is the most spectacular.

The garden is located on 1411 Highway 64/264 in Manteo. There is an admission fee. For more information, call (252) 473-3234 or visit www.outerbanks.com/elizabethangardens/.

Cyndi Lauderdale

Gardening in May

Lawns

- Do not apply herbicides on windy days; it may endanger other crops or your health.
- Warm-season grasses such as Bermuda, zoysia or centipede can be planted now.
- Mow cool-season grasses, such as fescues, at a height of 3 to 3 1/2 inches to help them survive hot, dry periods.

Ornamentals

- Cedar apple rust can be controlled on crabapple and apple leaves by spraying with a home orchard spray.
 - Pinch back annuals when 4 to 6 inches high to promote bushy growth. Some that require pinching are zinnias, petunias and salvias.
 - If an old tree shows signs of advanced rotting, remove it before it becomes a safety hazard.
 - Add a fresh layer of mulch to reduce weeds and fluctuations in soil temperature, help retain moisture and prevent damage from mowers.
 - Plant seeds of annual vines such as moonflower, scarlet runner beans or passionflower to cover arbors, mailboxes or light posts.
 - Replace pansies with summer-blooming annuals.
 - When planting container gardens or hanging baskets, do not mix sun-loving plants with shade-loving plants in the same container.
- ### Edibles
- Thin peaches to 4 to 6 inches apart for large, high quality fruit.
 - Train and support tomatoes, pole beans, peppers and eggplants.
 - Sidedress sweet corn when it is knee-high.
 - Make consecutive plantings of beans over a few weeks to extend your harvest.

Karen Neill



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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**
Extension Communication Specialist – Urban Programs

Project Coordinator: **Emily Revels**
Consumer Horticulture Agent, Mecklenburg County

Assistant Editor: **Karen Neill**
Consumer Horticulture Agent, Guilford County

Compilations Editor: **Ben Dungan**
Consumer Horticulture Agent, Gaston County

County	Name	Phone
Buncombe	Linda Blue	(828)255-5522
Cabarrus	David Goforth	(704)792-0430
Catawba	Fred Miller	(828)465-8240
Currituck	Crystal Paul	(252)232-2262
Durham	Paul McKenzie	(919)560-0525
Forsyth	Craig Mauney	(336)767-8213
Gaston	Ben Dungan	(704)922-XXXX
Guilford	Karen Neill	(336)375-XXXX
Henderson	Diane Ashburn	(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
New Hanover	David Barkley	(910)452-6393
Orange	Royce Hardin	(919)245-2050
Randolph	Amy Lynn Bartel	(336)318-6005
Rowan	Darrell Blackwelder	(704)633-0571
Union	Willie Earl Wilson	(704)283-3741
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