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Increase Their
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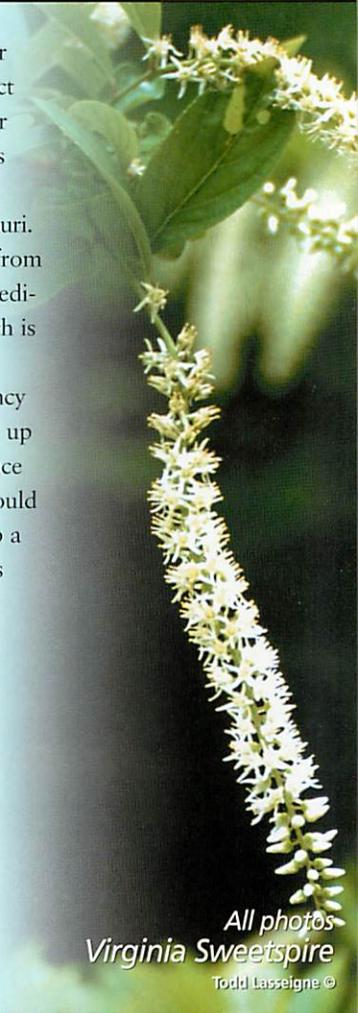
JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

Sweetspire, A Great North Carolina Native

Virginia sweetspire, *Itea virginica*, has the characteristics we all look for when we hear the word "native." Easy to establish, sweetspire is insect and disease resistant and drought tolerant. It has great leaf and flower color and works well in the naturalized sections of the urban landscape. This deciduous shrub is considered homegrown, not just in North Carolina but from the pine barrens of New Jersey to the Florida wetlands and west to Missouri.

Sweetspire produces white, fragrant flowers in May or June on racemes from 3- to 6-inches long. It flowers on the previous season's wood, so prune immediately after the blooms fade. Fall color is superb when the green foliage, which is oblong and slightly serrated, turns to hues of yellow, orange, crimson and purple and remains on the plant until December. One drawback is its tendency to spread. A mature plant might only be 3 to 5 feet in height but will spread up to 10 feet in width. This tendency to take up space makes this a perfect choice for mass plantings in tough locations such as slopes or hillsides where we would frequently use junipers. Sweetspire can handle plenty of sun but will develop a thinner canopy in light shade. Though this plant tolerates dry sites, it prefers moist, fertile soil.

Look for some of the nursery selections such as 'Henry's Garnet' and 'Little Henry' that have a more restrained growing pattern. These selections will have the characteristics noted above but the spread will be limited to 1 1/2 times the height of the specimen. Both can be seen at the JC Raulston Arboretum (JCRA) at NC State University. If you would like to compare additional but perhaps less common sweetspire cultivars, the JCRA also retains 'Longspire', 'Merlot' and 'Shirley's Compact' within its collections. The JCRA is located at 4301 Beryl Road in Raleigh; Web address is www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum. *Carl Matyac*



All photos
Virginia Sweetspire
Todd Lasseigne ©

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Ornamental Grasses and Companion Plants



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Variegated Hakone Grass



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'Hameln' Dwarf Fountain Grass

Ornamental Grasses Add Color, Texture, Variety to Landscape

Ornamental grasses are quite popular for North Carolina landscapes. Their striking array of textures, forms, sizes and colors offers multiseason interest with unique appeal for designers and gardeners. The term "ornamental grass" describes all grasslike plants, including sedges, reeds, rushes and a wide host of others.

The leaves and flowers of grasses each have their distinct ranges of color. Spring and summer foliage colors include myriad greens, from dark forest to lime and gray-green to blue-green, as well as powder blue, red and bright yellow. Variegated foliage adds cream white and snow white to the choice, as well as occasional suffusions of rose-pink during cool days at the beginning and end of the growing season.

Foliage colors of grasses have a long-lasting presence in the garden, remaining as various flowers come and go. The spring foliage of golden millet, *Milium effusum* 'Aureum', is vivid chartreuse, which can match the color strength of May flowers in the landscape garden. The rich sea-blue fescue, *Festuca glauca* 'Meerblau', will continue long after the surrounding heaths and heathers have ceased blooming.

Following is a list of a few grasses with a brief description of form, habit and color.

Weeping lovegrass, *Eragrostis curvula*, is a favorite for eastern North Carolina on slopes or eroded areas, and is hardy in zones 6 to 10.

Pennisetum alopecuroides 'Hameln' is a dwarf fountain grass that is great in masses and works well in smaller gardens. It grows to 2 feet with plumes and is hardy in zones 5 to 9. Quaking grass, *Briza media*, is a cool-season perennial that grows best in full sun. Use in rock gardens and dried arrangements. It is hardy in zones 4 to 7.

Northern sea oats, *Chasmanthium latifolium*, is an excellent grass to use in a mass planting or as a

specimen plant. Northern sea oats spread by underground creeping rhizomes, grow 2 to 5 feet and are green during spring and summer, turning to a beautiful tan in late fall. *Imperata cylindrica*, 'Red Baron' Japanese blood grass, grows 12 to 18 inches tall and exhibits beautiful cranberry-colored foliage in summer and fall. It is hardy to zone 7.

The *Carex* genus includes over 3,000 species whose popularity in the landscape has increased tremendously in the past few years. *Carex comans* 'Bronze', a New Zealand hair sedge, has long, thin, arching and trailing foliage with bronze, copper-like color. Its unique shape makes it an excellent specimen plant, and it is hardy in zones 7 to 9. 'Frosty Curls', *Carex albula*, is a versatile plant. It does well in full sun to partial shade and is drought tolerant. Its light green, thin leaves cascade down and almost lie on the ground. 'Frosty Curls' is a great container plant that sometimes appears silvery in shade gardens. It is hardy in zones 7 to 9.

Ornamental grasses are highly resistant to insect and disease problems, tolerant to heat and drought, and require little or no pruning. Two important requirements are full sun and well-drained soil. The grasses listed have specific hardiness limitations and should not be used beyond the recommended zones.

Prune back ornamental grasses in spring to eliminate any overwintering insects or diseases. This is best accomplished with pruning shears or electric hedge clippers. The new growth will begin to appear in late spring when it is time to apply fertilizer. General recommendations would include 8-8-8 or 10-10-10. For clump-type grasses, use 1 to 1 1/2 cups per established plant. For ground-cover-type plantings use 2 to 3 pounds of a complete fertilizer per 100-foot-square of bed area.

Willie Earl Wilson

Fall Webworms

Fall webworms leave a very unsightly web in the branches of many fruit and ornamental trees, and they are most noticeable in late summer to early fall, hence their name.

They have two generations per year: the first occurs in May and the second in July and August, with the second one usually being most harmful. The larval stage causes most of the damage due to feeding on the leaves within the web. The younger or immature larvae feed on the leaf, leaving the veins; the mature larvae will consume the whole leaf with the exception of the petiole. Some of their favorite plant

species are the pecan, elm, willow, birch and chokecherry.

Female moths lay masses of eggs on the underside of leaves from May to August. After the eggs hatch, the larvae will form their webs in the branches and then proceed to feed on the web-enclosed foliage. There are two races of this insect. One has a black head capsule and a yellow or green body with a dark stripe down the back and long, white hairs. Black and orange tubercles, or small bumps, are along its sides. The other has an orange to red head and a yellowish-tan body with orange to reddish

see **Fall Webworms** on page 3 ▶



Why are my trees dying?

Most of us have a soft spot in our hearts for trees.

It's upsetting when they start to decline, and many people suspect some plague or pest has invaded overnight. In most cases, however, the cause turns out to be less dramatic, but more complex. If the decline occurs within two years after planting, it is almost certainly due to improper installation. There seems to be an epidemic of trees that are planted too deeply, mulched to death and girdled by guy lines. In many cases we find that the installer failed to fold back the burlap which leads to the roots dying before they can become established.

Burlap acts as a wicking material and pulls water away from the roots when left exposed.

With mature trees, the cause of the decline usually can be traced to some stressful event within the past five years. With large trees, any type of soil disturbance within 50 to 75 feet of the trunk can be detrimental. Excavation, tillage, trenching and grading can cause severe damage to the root system. Covering the roots or crown with deep soil or mulch can also lead to dieback. Keep in mind that a large tree that is dying can pose a significant hazard to people and property. Contact a certified arborist to help you evaluate the problem and to recommend a course of action. **Paul McKenzie**

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Fall Webworms

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tubercles along the sides. The hairs are brownish in color. The adults are white moths that have black spots or orange markings on the body and legs.

Controlling fall webworms in the home landscape is not necessary as their feeding usually does not significantly damage the health of a tree. Usually, natural predators and parasites will keep the webworms in check, particularly if their web is broken open. If you want to remove the web for aesthetic reasons, use a stick or pole with a nail inserted crosswise to snag individual webs. Twist the pole after insertion into the web and wrap the web to remove it. If spraying does become necessary, for aesthetic or other reasons, some possible options are acephate (Orthene), *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Dipel) and pyrethrins (Pyrenone). Though they are not a serious problem in the landscape, they can affect production on such trees as pecans. If you have questions, please contact your county Cooperative Extension Center for more information.

Crystal Paul

ENVIRO- TIP

Tap the Sun's Energy to Control Pests

Want to know how to control some of your plant pests just by using the sun? Solarization is a practical, non-chemical technique which traps radiant heat energy from the sun and raises the temperature of the surrounding environment which causes physical, chemical and biological changes in the soil. These changes help control or suppress soilborne plant pathogens such as fungi, bacteria, nematodes and weeds.

Solarization also provides other benefits. When the soil is prepared for the solarization process, soil tilth often improves which helps plants grow. The benefits of higher yields and improved quality, while reducing the use of pesticides, help make up for the inconvenience associated with solarization.

oversaturate the soil. Add just enough water to make the soil moist. Next, place a piece of plastic (1 to 6 mils) over the soil and bury the edges about 12 inches deep in a trench. Clear plastic is preferable though color plastic may be used.

Timing

Long, hot, sunny days are needed to reach the soil temperatures required to kill soilborne pests and weed seed. The longer the soil is heated, the better and deeper the control will be of all soil pests. In North Carolina, mid-June through mid-August are the best months to get desired results. Leave the plastic on the soil for 4 to 6 weeks. This will heat up the soil to the point of killing off most of the plant pests and pathogens to a depth of almost 8 inches.

Natural ways to control pests are very popular and there are many best management practices that you can add to your pest control regimen that will minimize the amount of pesticides you use. Contact your local Cooperative Extension Center for more details. **David Barkley**



Robert E. Lyons ©

gardentalk

*"The flowers
are nature's
jewels, with
whose wealth
she decks her
summer beauty"*

– George Croly

How to Solarize Soil

Till and then rake the soil free of debris and large clumps. If the soil is dry and powdery be sure to water. Do not



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Gardening in June and July

Lawns

- Water your lawn when it shows signs of moisture stress: bluish-gray color, footprints that remain in the lawn after walking on it and possibly wilted, folded or curled up leaves.
- This is the time when brown patch shows up in cool-season grasses. Do not fertilize cool-season grasses in the summer.
- Cut the grass at the proper height: turf-type tall fescue – 3 to 3 1/2 inches; zoysia – 1 to 2 inches; centipede – 1 1/2 to 2 inches; hybrid Bermuda – 1 to 1 1/2 inches; common Bermuda – 2 inches.

Ornamentals

- Snap off growing tips of your chrysanthemum plants when they are about 6 inches tall. They will branch more and increase fall bloom.
 - Stake dahlia tubers when you plant them so they'll have support later.
 - Be extremely careful not to damage the bark when mowing or using a string trimmer around trees and shrubs.
 - Check plants regularly for damaging insects and diseases.
 - Don't plant trees and shrubs now unless you are prepared to water regularly. Better to plan what you want and wait until fall to plant them.
- Edibles**
 - Train and support tomatoes.
 - Watch for blossom-end rot on tomatoes. Apply a calcium chloride solution if the disease occurs.
 - Cover fig bushes and blueberry bushes with netting to control birds from eating your harvest.
 - Allow strawberry runners to develop into new daughter plants. This will increase next year's harvest of berries.
 - Continue spraying the orchard for diseases and insects. **Craig Mauney**

Garden Spot

The Mountain Horticultural Crops Research and Extension Center

in Fletcher conducts research on fruit, vegetable and ornamental crops that results in better plants for the horticultural industry and the public.

Located in the southern Appalachian Mountains near Asheville, this is one of the most visited research stations in the state. Visitors get a close-up look at research projects ranging from apples, to rhododendrons, azaleas and mountain laurels, to medicinal herbs. Another research emphasis is centered on agritourism and studying the use of sunflowers and other plants for crop mazes.

Visitors may not roam freely throughout the research areas, but they are welcome as part of group tours. To arrange a group tour of 10 or more at the research station, call (828) 684-3562. You don't have to be part of the tour to enjoy a touch-and-smell herb garden on the research site. To learn more, visit <http://fletcher.ces.state.nc.us/>.

Darrell Blackwelder



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