

EXTENSION'S Successful Gardenersm

NC STATE UNIVERSITY NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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

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TOP AWARDS
RECEIVED FROM:

- Garden Writers Association
- 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

JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

Sourwood Brings Native Beauty to Landscapes

ew native trees provide the ornamental landscape value as the sourwood, *Oxydendrum arboreum*. Panicles of lily-of-the-valley-type flowers followed by brilliant scarlet color in early fall make this tree a highly desirable landscape specimen.

Sourwood, also known as sorrel tree or lily-of-the-valley tree, is best known as an important source of honey for beekeepers. It is a small, undergrowth tree that grows throughout the Piedmont uplands and along Piedmont streams on well-drained lowland areas. The showy tree is commonly seen along highways and edges of hardwood forests of the Piedmont and the mountains.

Sourwood is among the latest of the trees to bloom each season, with white, bell-shaped flowers appearing from late June to August. The dense flower clusters resemble Japanese pieris, *Pieris japonica*, except the panicles of the sourwood are longer and more open. Maintaining this beautiful bloom in the fall against scarlet leaves makes it a spectacular landscape plant.

Planted in dense shade, the tree develops a slender trunk and small crown. Placed in the open landscape, it forms a short, often leaning trunk which divides into several stout, ascending limbs with an ornate appearance. As the tree matures, the bark becomes dense and cork-like, another design attribute.

Growth of the tree is somewhat slow and the tree is extremely difficult, almost impossible, to transplant from the wild. Your best bet is to locate a nursery that has them in containers. Sourwoods are native trees and may be difficult to locate, but the extra effort will be worth it.

The JC Raulston Arboretum (JCRA) is taking a look at the scarcity of cultivars that exist for this common native species which remains underrepresented in the home landscape. The JCRA views it as having great potential and welcomes the chance to examine new introductions that become available.

Darrell Blackwelder

All Photos
Sourwood

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Proven Techniques for Planting

Planting techniques for landscape plants vary according to the situation. Many shrubs and groundcovers are planted in large beds. In this case, the best approach is to modify a large area of soil in a uniform manner. Till in several inches of organic matter such as composted, finely ground pine bark. Add other materials such as superphosphate and lime if a soil test indicates they are needed. After the entire bed is prepared, place all the plants where you want them before you plant any of them. They are much easier to rearrange at this point.

Most landscape plants are grown in containers. These plants sometimes have been in containers too long and they become root-bound, a condition indicated by a large mass of roots encircling the root ball. If this is the case, make several shallow, vertical cuts on the outside of the root ball. This will help ensure that the roots can grow properly. When you finish installing the plants, the crown (where the stem meets the soil) of each plant should not be deeper than the surrounding soil. Planting too deeply causes many landscape plants to die prematurely.

Some drainage-sensitive plants like azaleas are sometimes planted a little high with the surrounding soil being sloped up to the crown. After smoothing out the soil with a rake, mulch with several inches of pine bark or pine straw and water thoroughly. Don't make the mistake of not watering because "they're calling for rain tonight." Check newly installed plants often and water as needed until they become well established.

A big change in recent years has been the recommendation on how to plant individual plants in the landscape. When it comes to trees, you may

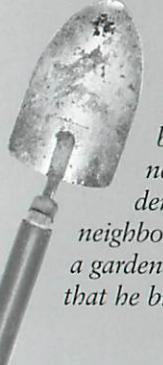
have heard the recommendation to dig a hole much larger than the ball of the tree and mix in lots of organic matter with the backfill. Cooperative Extension no longer recommends adding organic matter in this type of situation. The current recommendation is to prepare a large area of loosened soil but not any deeper than the root ball of the tree. We don't want the bottom of the root ball to sit on loosened soil since that may allow it to sink, causing the crown of the tree to be deeper than the surrounding soil. The easiest way to think of it is to pretend you are tilling up a circular garden area with the tree being planted in the middle of that area. Again, you can add materials like lime and superphosphate if soil test results indicate they are needed.

In poorly drained soils, there is a technique where the tree can be planted high but this should not be used in most situations. When you have the plant properly situated in the hole, fill in around the root ball with the soil you removed, firm it lightly with your foot and smooth out the soil. Mulch a large area around the tree but don't put the mulch too deep, especially around the crown of the plant. Some folks have piled mulch up so high that it has been referred to as "volcano mulching." Again, three to four inches of mulch is sufficient. Don't forget the water.

Staking is no longer an automatic practice. Observe newly planted trees after moderate winds. If they don't start to lean, you may be able to skip the staking. For more details on modern planting recommendations, contact your local Cooperative Extension agent.

Kevin Starr

gardentalk



"Your first job is to prepare the soil. The best tool is your neighbor's garden tiller. If your neighbor does not own a garden tiller, suggest that he buy one."

— Dave Barry

Master Gardeners Provide Gardening Advice

Have gardening questions? We have the answers. Currently, in 75 of North Carolina's 100 counties, more than 3,000 Master Gardner Extension Volunteers™ extend Cooperative Extension's educational efforts by providing research-based lawn care, gardening and landscaping information.

Before becoming a Master Gardener, volunteers undergo 40 or more hours of extensive training by some of the best horticultural experts in the state, many of whom are part of Extension's Successful Gardener team.

The telephone hotline is one of the most popular Master Gardner efforts, and can be found in many counties. Residents can call in to have their gardening questions answered by one of these highly trained volunteers.

Master Gardeners do a lot more than just answer the phone, however. The program is run on a county basis and is always tailored to meet the needs of the respective county. In your county, you may find Master Gardeners

see Master Gardeners on page 3 ▶



How do I get rid of boxelder bugs?

Boxelder bugs are large black and red insects about 1/2-inch long and are found throughout most of the United States. Huge numbers of these insects congregate on buildings, walls, sidewalks and windows in the fall. They are searching for dry, protected locations to overwinter and frequently find their way into houses, which can cause concern for the homeowner.

They are most often found around boxelder and maple trees where they feed on seeds and other plant material. Removing boxelder trees will reduce the number of boxelder bugs

that are present, but this is not always possible. The use of a tank-type vacuum cleaner will enable the homeowner to remove large quantities of insects by simply vacuuming them and disposing of the bag. There are also chemicals that will kill the boxelder bug on contact but use these pesticides outside only. Treat thresholds and windowsills with cyfluthrin or bifenthrin, following the label directions.

Boxelder bugs are tough to control and if the homeowner can wait them out, they will leave on their own, leaving no damage but great relief on the part of the homeowner.

Donna Teasley

Master Gardeners



continued from page 2

running a plant clinic at a garden center, installing a demonstration garden at the local park, speaking to your civic group, working with your children in a school garden or teaching Extension's Successful Gardener workshops.

Regardless of the county or the specific type of project, the goal of the program is always the same: to provide sound horticultural advice to the public. Extension Master Gardeners use unbiased, research-based information from NC State, NC A&T State and other land-grant universities. Their emphasis is on protecting the environment and being a good steward of our natural resources.

To get your horticultural questions answered or to learn how you can become a Master Gardener, contact your county Cooperative Extension Center. Find your county contact at www.ces.ncsu.edu. Visit the Master Gardener Web site at www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/masgar.

Paul McKenzie

ENVIRO-TIP



Robert E. Lyons ©

Outdoor Sanitation Helps Reduce Pest Problems

Bugs have company on the pest list. Other pests include weeds, diseases, nematodes and rodents. Ignoring them rarely results in effective control. Rather, failure to take action usually results in more pests and more problems.

Breaking the life cycle of pests is something we sometimes do unknowingly. When we cut off the top of weeds, dig them up, remove diseased or insect-infested plants, till the soil or rake up rotten fruit, we are sanitizing.

Pests often capitalize on neglected conditions for regeneration. We notice it from the ground up. Move a log and what do you see? Beetles, ants, termites or the larval stage of some unknown pest.

Ever wonder how a new weed got started? Often a mature plant dropped its seeds, which traveled by wind, water, rodent or bird. Let's not forget the mower or tiller where the seeds and rhizomes often attach themselves to the blade or tines of the equipment. Bermudagrass definitely will get its start this way, especially if equipment is shared.

Move up a little higher into the trunk of trees like dogwoods, birches,

peaches and lilac bushes, and there is the perfect habitat for borers. Cut away loose bark and weak branches to help prevent these pests from multiplying. The wet season this year has been ideal for the spread of fire blight on apple and pear trees. Removal of infested branches a foot or more below the lowest infested part is recommended.

The crown area of trees and shrubs is where we find insects such as bagworms, tent caterpillars and twig girdlers. Certain species of plants are more susceptible to each of these different insects. Among the susceptible are leyland cypress, cedar, apple, cherry, juniper, ash, pecan and persimmon. Remove and dispose any cocoons, webs or fallen limbs.

Canker, mildew, blight, rot and insects, like scale and aphids, are residents in the crown of trees. Anytime they occur, a portion of a limb can be removed to eliminate disease or insects from recurring.

To learn more about dealing with pests, visit www.ces.ncsu.edu/resources/pests. **Don Breedlove**



The Blue Ridge

Parkway offers some of the best of fall color. This pleasure road along the summit of the Blue Ridge is over 400 miles long, from Virginia to North Carolina, and it links two eastern national parks – Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains. Along the way, there are many fascinating attractions and historical stops.

The real show begins in the fall when millions of trees start their annual change of color. The bright colors shine from September through October against a backdrop of evergreens, such as cedar, hemlock, mountain laurel, pine and rhododendron. The first wave of color comes from the dogwoods, maples, hickories and poplars. Oaks usually change later, after the first frost. Each autumn, more than a million people will drive the Blue Ridge Parkway to enjoy nature's beauty. Learn more at www.nps.gov/blri.

Diane Ashburn

Karen Neill

**Saturday, Oct. 4, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., various times
Southern Ideal Home Show (Oct. 3 - 5)**

**Greensboro Coliseum
Fee: Free with show admission
Details: (336) 375-5876**

Get your gardening questions answered anytime during the show by Extension Master Gardeners at the horticultural information booth.

Successful Gardenersm newsletter is provided to you compliments of:



Gardening in October

Lawns

- Remove leaves from newly seeded lawns to avoid smothering new grass.
- If not overseeding, apply a preemergent herbicide to established lawns to control chickweed.
- Warm-season lawns like Bermuda, centipede and zoysia can be overseeded with annual ryegrass.

Ornamentals

- Plant pansies to add color to your yard for fall, winter and spring months.
- Groundcovers will become well established when planted now.
- Fertilize spring-flowering bulbs at planting time with a balanced fertilizer.
- Divide perennials and transplant now.
- Set out new landscape plants.
- Dig and store bulbs such as dahlias and caladiums.
- Plant flower seeds this fall for bells of Ireland, cornflowers, Johnny-jump-ups, larkspurs and sweet peas. These plants need the cold of winter to properly develop in time for next spring.
- If you have a water garden, cover it with a light mesh netting to keep falling leaves out of pond.

Edibles

- Start salad vegetables in a cold frame and enjoy them all winter.
- Start filling compost bin with spent vegetables and fall leaves.
- If you still have green tomatoes, fry them up like a true Southerner or wrap each in an individual sheet of newspaper and store in a cool, dry place. Check weekly for ripening.

Learn More

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

Karen Neill

www.successfulgardener.org



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

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All Agents of N.C. Cooperative Extension

Ask for Extension's Successful Gardenersm newsletter at one of your local garden centers each month!

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.successfulgardener.org>

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