

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

JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

## Virginia Creeper Is in the Ivy League

**W**

hen it comes to a fast-growing vine to cover an arbor or trellis, Virginia creeper, *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*, just might fit the bill. Many gardeners are turning away from traditional vines like Chinese wisteria and English ivy due to their tendency to invade natural areas. Virginia creeper, a North Carolina native, is a worthy alternative.

With its rapid growth rate, Virginia creeper can quickly cover a trellis. It would be equally happy climbing a fence, which would make a nice backdrop for a perennial border. The large leaves are deeply lobed into five leaflets, adding a nice texture to the garden. Although the flowers are inconspicuous, the foliage of this deciduous vine turns a wonderful shade of burgundy prior to fall leaf drop. The blue-black berries also add a nice touch to the autumn landscape. Keep in mind that the berries are very poisonous to humans, but will be thoroughly enjoyed by the neighborhood birds. For best growth, plant in good soil in full sun to part shade.

Like English ivy, Virginia creeper also can serve as a groundcover. Regular trimming will be required to keep this fast-growing plant from invading adjacent areas. Though it will look great climbing an arbor, keep this and most other vines off of trees and houses. The vines add excess weight to limbs during winter ice storms, and the climbing tendrils can damage the siding and paint on your house.

The Oriental version of this vine, *Parthenocissus tricuspidata*, or Boston ivy, is the trademark plant of the Ivy League universities. Virginia creeper may not be a show-stopper, but this versatile and durable vine can certainly serve as one of the backbone plants of your landscape. Consider one of the green and white variegated varieties such as 'Star Showers' or 'Variegata'.

See the true diversity of this genus at the JC Raulston Arboretum in Raleigh. In addition to the curiously variegated Virginia creeper in the Klein-Pringle White Garden, the glowing, yellow-green 'Fenway Park' version of *P. tricuspidata* is making quick work of a concrete column that supports the McSwain Center. **Paul McKenzie**



*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*  
Robert E. Lyons ©



*P. tricuspidata*  
Robert E. Lyons ©



*P. quinquefolia*  
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*P. quinquefolia 'Variegata'*  
Robert E. Lyons ©

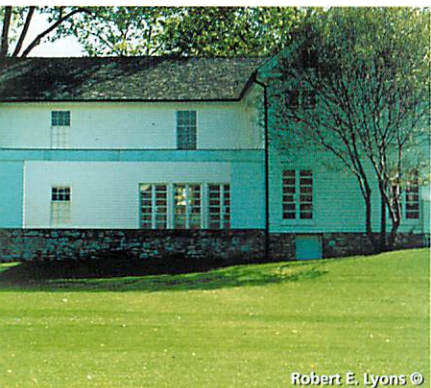
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## Fall Lawn Care Is First Step to Beautiful Lawn Next Spring

A look around most neighborhoods reveals that lawn care ranges from the perfect, lush green carpet to lawns that cry out for help, with many in between these two ends of the spectrum. Here is a tip that works for anyone, regardless of their lawn condition. A beautiful lawn next spring begins this fall. Use this guide to improve the look of your lawn. Now is the time to start!

### Establishing a New Lawn

- When planting a new lawn, put a lot of emphasis on soil preparation. Have the soil tested. Based on the results, apply the needed lime and fertilizer, and mix these materials into the top 6 to 8 inches of the soil.
- For seeding a fescue lawn, the rule of thumb is to apply 6 pounds per 1,000 square feet of lawn.
- Mulch the newly seeded lawn lightly with straw to reduce erosion and to keep moisture around the seed.
- Keep the seed moist with frequent light waterings, two to three times per day.
- As the seed begins to germinate, water for longer periods and less frequently.
- Begin mowing when the grass is about 4 inches high.

### Renovating an Existing Lawn

- Early fall is also the best time to renovate fescue lawns. A way to renovate a lawn is to overseed an existing stand of grass.
- Remove weeds prior to overseeding. If using a herbicide, follow instructions. Remember to use postemergence herbicides 4 to 6 weeks before overseeding. If you use a nonselective herbicide, such as Roundup, do so 7 to 10 days prior to renovation.
- Mow grass at the lowest setting and collect the clippings. If needed, use a dethatcher at this time to collect thatch in the grass. Next, core aerate to

provide good seed to soil contact.

- Apply a starter fertilizer, according to directions, over the prepared lawn area.
- Apply the grass seed at the rate of about 3 pounds per 1,000 square feet of area.
- Keep renovated area moist with light sprinklings of water several times daily. As the seed germinates, reduce the frequency of watering.
- Mow the renovated lawn at a height of 2.5 to 3.5 inches. Do not bag clippings.
- In November, make your second fertilizer application. Also apply lime in November if soil test indicates a need.
- Use proper lawn management to prevent having to renovate annually.

### Caring for an Established Lawn

- If you have not had a soil test within the last two to three years, complete this now. Test results will indicate how much lime, nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium your lawn needs. You can use a complete fertilizer with a ratio of 4:1:2 or 3:1:3 (N-P-K or nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium) in lieu of a soil test but it is not a good substitute for a soil test. Fertilize the fescue lawn in September, November and March, using 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of lawn.
- Continue to water the lawn in the fall, applying about 1 inch of water per week early in the morning.
- For weed problems, apply a broad leaf herbicide this fall. Be sure to follow label directions.
- Core aerate compacted lawns to move air and water down to the roots. This can be followed by seeding. If your lawn is well established do not overseed.
- Continue to mow fescue grass during the fall months at a height of 2.5 to 3.5 inches.

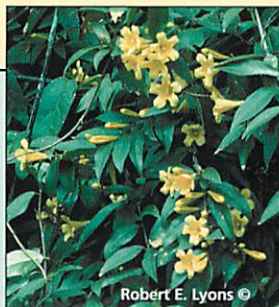
*Toby Bost*

## Simply Devine

A boring fence or arbor become much more interesting and alluring with vines creeping and twining about them. Vines can add color as well as disguise homely structures. A flowering vine planted against a wall will create a link between your home and your garden. If your garden is new, vines will add a look of maturity.

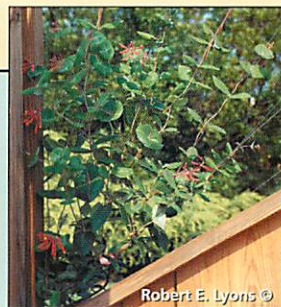
When planting vines to climb on fences, make sure the fence is made of naturally decay-resistant woods, such as red cedar, or use treated materials. Brick, iron or concrete are also good support structures for vines.

Vines may be either evergreen or deciduous, flowering or non-flowering, annual or perennial. Chinese trumpet vine, *Campsis grandiflora*,



Robert E. Lyons ©

*Carolina Yellow Jessamine*



Robert E. Lyons ©

*Trumpet Honeysuckle*

*flora*, is a perennial deciduous vine that grows rapidly. It shows off its large orange blossoms throughout the summer. Lady Banks' rose, *Rosa banksiae*, is a perennial evergreen vine

which grows rapidly and can create dramatic backdrops for fences. Carolina jessamine, *Gelsemium sempervirens*, is an evergreen perennial vine that will tolerate some shade. It, too, grows rapidly and works well as a screening plant.

see **Simply Devine** on page 3 ▶



## Why doesn't my holly tree have any berries?

Holly trees are either completely male or completely female. Only the females have berries. Female trees have to be mature, which only takes a few years. Plus, they have to be healthy and energetic which means they are getting adequate sunshine and proper nutrition. In partial shade, hollies will occasionally have a few berries, but not every year. In the long run, nutrition is seldom a problem. Too much nitrogen may make a plant vegetative for a few years but they will grow out of it. Holly bushes occasionally get into an alternate bearing mode where a

heavy crop one year uses so much nutrition that the plant doesn't set berries the following year. With no berries, the nutritional status builds back up and the following year it again sets a heavy load and the cycle is repeated. Although some hollies can set a partial crop without cross pollination, most female hollies need a nearby male tree and some type of insect to go back and forth. Be careful not to spray insecticides during bloom. If there are no male plants within 400 yards, consider planting some. One male plant per five female hollies is a fairly good ratio. *David Goforth*

## Simply Devine

*continued from page 2*

For some summer fun with vines, try some annual vines. Consider cardinal climber vine, *Ipomoea x multifida*, with its deep red flowers with white or yellow throats, or cypress vine, *Ipomoea quamoclit*, with its fine foliage and mix of bright red, pink and white flowers.

*Amy-Lynn Albertson*

## ENVIRO- TIP

## Compost Boosts Your Gardening Efforts

The leaves of autumn not only provide beautiful color, but also can be a source of plant nutrients through composting. Composted leaves and other plant material also help conserve moisture, improve the physical properties of the soil and reduce weed competition. Leaves and other yard wastes are banned from most landfills, making composting a viable alternative for homeowners.

Composting is the decomposition of organic materials including leaves, kitchen scraps, grass clippings, spent vegetable plants and other organic material. Avoid composting pine needles, citrus rinds, corncobs and pecan shells; they break down very slowly. Do not add meat scraps to a compost pile; they attract unwanted animals such as skunks or opossums.

Pile spent leaves and other organic material, along with soil and fertilizer, into a large compost "sandwich." If possible, shred leaves through a mower to expedite the decomposition process. Start with a layer of leaves 10 inches or more and then add an inch of soil and a sprinkling of fertilizer. Then add another 10-inch layer

of leaves. Microbes within the soil accelerate the decomposition of leaves and other material. Organic fertilizer companies have packaged bacteria and other microorganisms that specifically break down organic materials. Fertilizer supplies nitrogen, feeding the microbes that break down organic matter.

Compost bins can be as simple as a piece of wire or a pressure treated lumber frame, to electric drums which automatically turn composting material.

Turn compost piles occasionally to prevent unpleasant odors and to hasten decomposition. Turning also exposes unwanted weed seeds, insects and pathogens to high temperatures. The center of an actively decomposing pile should reach 150 to 160 degrees to complete the process.

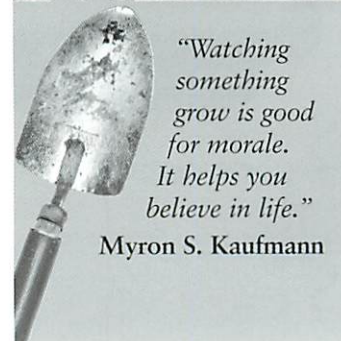
The final product from the compost pile should be brown and earthy, similar to peat moss. Composting usually takes a year to complete. Find more information on composting at [www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/hortinternet/compost\\_mulch.html](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/hortinternet/compost_mulch.html) *Darrell Blackwelder*



## Extension's Successful Gardener<sup>SM</sup> Learning Center

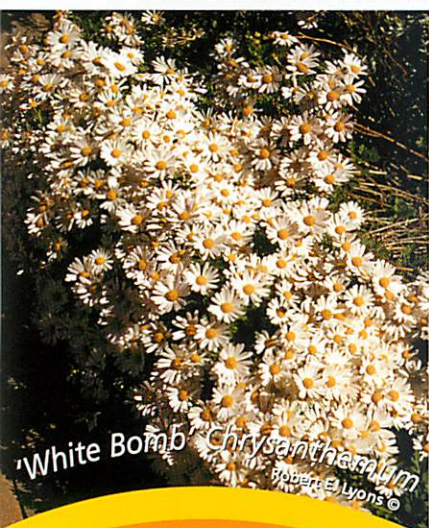
► Visit Extension's Successful Gardener Learning Center at the **Southern Ideal Home Show** in Raleigh, **Sept. 24 through 26**. Pick up the latest issue of the Successful Gardener newsletter and other gardening information. Get your gardening questions answered by Extension's Master Gardeners and horticulture agents. Look for us in Dorton Arena.

## gardentalk



*"Watching something grow is good for morale. It helps you believe in life."*

*Myron S. Kaufmann*



## Gardening in September

### Lawns

- Seed cool-season grasses such as fescue and bluegrass.
- Fertilize cool-season grasses with 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.
- Control winter weeds with preemergent herbicides, only if you are not planning to reseed your lawn. Preemergent herbicides will kill seeds if applied several days before or after seeding. This varies with product so check product label.

### Ornamentals

- Do not prune or fertilize your trees and shrubs. This will disrupt their internal process of preparing for winter dormancy.
- Now is the time to place spring bulb orders. Do not plant bulbs yet; wait for cooler weather to arrive.

- Fall is for planting trees and shrubs. Contact your county Cooperative Extension Center and ask for Extension's Successful Gardener Tree Planting Guide for proper planting techniques or find it at [www.successfulgardener.org](http://www.successfulgardener.org).

- Set out cool weather annuals for winter color. Do not forget to plant your fall chrysanthemums to welcome in the season.

- Plan to bring houseplants and tropical plants inside when temperatures dip below 50°F. Move plants into shade for a week to condition them to lower light levels indoors.

### Edibles

- Spray your nectarines, plums and peaches for the peachtree borer. Pay close attention to spraying the lowest set of branches and down the trunk to the soil line.

- Plant fall vegetables such as cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, collards, and lettuce. Sow radish, turnip, carrot, mustard and kale.

*Diane Ashburn*

### Grandfather

**Mountain**, located north of Linville and one mile from the Blue Ridge Parkway, is a great place to escape the summer and early fall heat, while taking in some breathtaking vistas. Come back in the spring to see beautiful rhododendron and 47 other rare and endangered plant and animal species. The red Catawba rhododendron is abundant all across Grandfather Mountain.

The more adventurous might walk the 228-foot suspension bridge which spans an 80-foot chasm at more than one mile in elevation, visit wildlife habitats for black bear, cougar, bald eagles and otters complete with native flora, or hike any of the 11 trails that vary in difficulty from a gentle walk in the woods to a rigorous trek across rugged peaks.

Fall color comes early to the peaks of Grandfather, so you don't have to wait until late fall to see spectacular foliage. Colors will be bright on the upper slopes as early as October 5. Color at Grandfather will peak between Oct. 10 and 20.

Call 1-800-468-7325 for more information.

*Carl Matyac*

Garden Spot



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