

Successful Gardener

NC STATE UNIVERSITY NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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

JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

Edgeworthia Lends Blooms and Fragrance to Winter

E*dgeworthia chrysantha*, also known as the paperbush plant, provides superb winter interest and fragrance. This well-branched shrub begins blooming in December, when it's nothing but a bare silhouette in the garden, and continues through the winter. The individual florets are tiny, but a few dozen make up a 1-1/2 to 2-inch cluster that will simply knock you sideways. One characteristic of edgeworthia, which is related to daphne, is that you smell it from great distances away before you ever see it. The fragrance is a bit like gardenia with a slightly spicier element thrown in.

Edgeworthia thrives in partial shade and appreciates well-enriched, moist soil. In spring, after the blooms pass, it sports lovely bluish foliage with silvery undertones that are both eye-catching and soothing. On a summertime visit to a local nursery, what appeared to be a rhododendron was labeled edgeworthia. It had a beautiful shape and form. Grown in the sun, the foliage was still acceptable, though not as lush green as a rhododendron grown in a shaded area. And in autumn – yes, another season of color – the foliage turns rich shades of yellow.

This shrub grows in zones 7 to 9, and in protected areas of Zone 6. It eventually reaches 7 feet high and wide and makes a nice stand-alone specimen or back-of-the-border choice. Space these plants about 7 feet apart in partial shade and rich, moist soil. You don't have to worry about missing the scent of the blooms, but you may want to plant edgeworthia within reach of passersby because the foliage invites handling. Be sure to snip a few blooms to keep the house fragrant through the winter.

Edgeworthia is now making its way into retail garden centers but may still be a bit hard to find. At the JC Raulston Arboretum, you can view 'Gold Rush' in the Winter Garden and 'John Bryant' near the Cascade. Another much more scarce cultivar, 'Red Dragon', has characteristic orange-red flowers. Although this form isn't currently in the JCRA display collections, that's no reason not to visit! **Donald Breedlove**



All photos
*Edgeworthia
chrysantha*
Robert E. Lyons ©



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International Association of
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National Association of
County Agricultural Agents
Southern Extension Forest
Resource Specialists
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County Agricultural Agents
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Priority Awards



Todd Lasseigne ©



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Trees are one of the great treasures of nature, until someone gets the bright idea to top them. There's a difference between pruning and topping, and topping has no place in the landscape. Compare these trees. The tree in the top photo has been topped and the bottom photo shows off the tree's natural beauty.

Don't Top the Trees

Topping is the practice of cutting back trees so that major branches and trunks are left as stubs of varying lengths. This practice is not recommended by tree experts. In fact, when considering the extent of tree disfigurement, decay and even death caused by topping, the tree damage caused by this practice is rivaled only by natural disasters such as ice storms and hurricanes.

Tree experts view topping as a very destructive practice. According to the International Society of Arboriculture, topping is perhaps the most harmful tree pruning practice known. Yet, despite more than 25 years of literature and seminars explaining its harmful effects, topping remains a common practice.

If that's the case, why do homeowners have their trees topped? There seems to be a variety of reasons. Some people are afraid of storm damage to their homes caused by the effects of wind or ice on nearby trees. Other folks want to try to limit the size of their trees. Unfortunately, one of the common reasons seems to be that their neighbors had it done. Tree toppers sometimes start in a neighborhood and then go from house to house resulting in a long line of damaged trees.

Topping is bad for trees for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that it damages the natural beauty of the trees. What took nature years to accomplish can be undone by a chainsaw in just a short period of time. Even if the trees grow back out, they will have a very unattractive appearance.

The wounds made as trunks and limbs are stubbed off can't heal properly and are ideal places for diseases and insects to get established. A severe topping in the winter is going to remove most of the leaf buds that were formed the previous season. These buds would have produced the leaves that make food for the plant through the process of photosynthesis. Thus the tree has to use up a lot of its stored food and also has to develop new buds to replace the thousands that were lost. Sometimes the trees are not able to overcome topping and die the first season after it's done. Why pay someone to damage your trees?

The appropriate course of action for a homeowner is to consult with a certified arborist. This certification is overseen by the International Society of Arboriculture (I.S.A.) and requires those who become certified to pass a test. This ensures that the arborist has a basic level of knowledge. Ask qualified arborists about your concerns. Keep in mind that a good arborist knows how to correctly prune a tree without topping it. Consult with as many arborists as you need to feel comfortable. Ask not only about cost, but also about things such as insurance and references. The I.S.A. Web site has helpful links titled "Why Hire An Arborist?" and "Why Topping Hurts Trees." For more information, visit the International Society of Arboriculture Web site at www.treesaregood.com or contact your local Cooperative Extension Center. **Fred Miller & Kevin Starr**

Successful Tree Planting

A major cause of unhealthy trees is improper planting. The most beneficial thing you can do for your tree is to properly prepare the hole where the tree is to be planted. To have good root growth, the tree needs to be able to grow roots out from the root-ball. Dig the hole two to five times wider than the root-ball, but no deeper than the root-ball. Place the tree in the hole and make sure it is straight. The top of the root-ball should be level with or slightly above the surrounding soil area. Fill in around the root-ball with the original soil that is removed from the hole. When the hole is half filled with the soil, water slowly to remove any air pockets then finish filling in around the root-ball with remaining soil.

When you finish planting, make sure the trunk flair (where the roots and trunk meet) is visible. Apply a 2- to 4-inch layer of mulch around the tree but do not let the mulch touch the trunk of the tree. Water slowly and thoroughly when you finish planting the tree. Continue to water for the first year or until the root system becomes established.

For more information on Tree Planting, go to www.successfulgardener.org and read the Tree Planting Guide. **Emily Revels**



Robert E. Lyons ©



Why is soil pH important?

Everyone preaches the benefits of lime to soil. However, many people may not realize why liming is important. The soil pH is a measure of how acidic or alkaline the soil is. Most North Carolina soils are acidic if left alone. Lime comes into play when we want to lower the acidity of the soil.

For the plant to take up all of the available nutrients from the soil, the soil pH must be at the right levels. Most plants prefer a pH between 6.0 – 7.0. There are

some exceptions to the rule. Azaleas, camellias and blueberries tend to like their soils a little more acidic with a soil pH of 5.5.

If the pH is not in those optimal levels, some nutrients may not be in a form where the roots can take them up. Other times too much of a nutrient is taken up, causing a nutrient toxicity in the plant.

The best way to find out where your soil is on the pH scale is to take a soil sample. The North Carolina Department of Agriculture offers free soil testing. To pick up a soil sample kit, stop by your local Cooperative Extension Center. **Ben Dungan**

ENVIRO-TIP

Safe Winter Storage of Pesticides and Fertilizers

As the fall gardening season slows to a halt, it's time to put up pesticides and fertilizers for the winter. A safe storage area for your gardening pesticides and fertilizers is important for many reasons, including protecting the environment and human health as well as maintaining the chemicals' effectiveness.

Use a winter storage area that is secure from children, animals and any other unwanted visitors. Good lighting is helpful for sorting and other tasks. Ventilation is important to keep volatile chemicals from contaminating other materials in storage, and for the health of the applicator. Separate the chemicals by type – herbicides, fungicides, insecticides and fertilizers – as additional insurance against contamination.

The storage area needs to be safe from dampness and possible flooding. Water damage and dampness can reduce the shelf life of many chemicals and can degrade metal and paper containers. Do not store chemicals on the floor. Temperature also can affect the shelf life of chemicals. Heat increases the volatility of stored chemicals, while freezes can cause

some containers to rupture. Check the label to see if specific temperature ranges are needed for storage of specific chemicals.

Make sure your storage site allows for containment of spills or leaks. Store cleanup materials nearby or on site. Store flammable liquids outside living areas and away from any ignitable sources. Make sure chemicals and their containers are in good condition before storing them. The product label must be legible and attached to the chemical container. Never store excess fertilizer or pesticides in empty food containers. Do not store pesticides with or near food, medicine or cleaning products.

It is useful to keep an inventory of stored pesticides and fertilizers in order to plan purchases for next spring. Be sure to include the product name, active ingredient, date of purchase, volume and the date stored. One way to minimize storage hassles is to plan ahead and only buy pesticides and fertilizers for one season at a time. Sometimes the smaller container that seemed more expensive will save you money and time in the long run. **Amy-Lynn Albertson**

Deck the Halls with Boughs of Holly . . .

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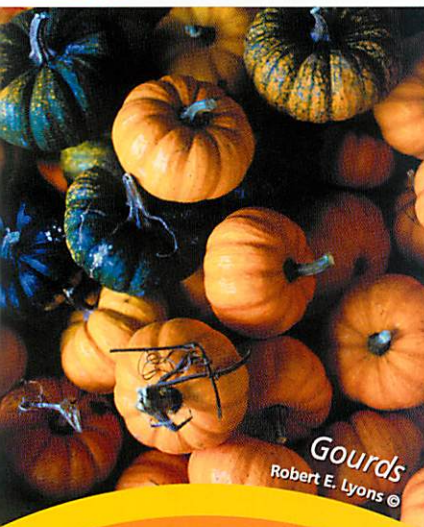
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gardentalk



"Of all man's works of art, a cathedral is greatest. A vast and majestic tree is greater than that."

Henry Ward Beecher



Gourds
Robert E. Lyons ©

Gardening in November

Lawns

- Continue to fertilize fescue lawns this month. Fertilizing at the end of November extends growth of cool-season grasses.
- Remove fallen leaves from lawns as soon as possible to provide ample sunlight for newly seeded and established lawns.
- Change the oil and tune the lawn mower if mowing has subsided. Also, service garden tractors, tillers and other gasoline powered equipment.
- Add gas conditioner to gas tanks to keep unused gas fresh during the winter.

Ornamentals

- Plant spring-flowering bulbs this month. Use premium sizes for best display for the spring.
- Continue to check indoor houseplants for overwintering insects. Insects often become a problem on plants brought indoors for the winter.
 - Clean garden tools for the winter. Remove dirt, grass and other organic debris from hand tools before winter storage.
 - Spray a thin coat of light oil such as WD-40 on shovels, rakes and other tools that come into contact with the soil. The thin oil coating extends tool life.
 - Fall and early winter is an excellent time to remove declining trees and shrubs.
 - Test soil every 2 to 3 years as fertility constantly changes. Spring testing often results in a glut at the NCDA soil testing labs with homeowners receiving recommendations too late in the season. Sample now to avoid delays in receiving results.
 - Study the landscape including trees and shrubs. Declining trees or shrubs are good indicators of cultural problems.
 - Poinsettias will be at their peak during the Thanksgiving season. Buy from local growers for the best selection. **Darrell Blackwelder**

The Nags Head Woods Ecological Preserve

presents the rare opportunity to walk in a deciduous forest while on a trip to the beach. This 1,000-plus acre tract in Dare County contains the best examples of very rare natural communities known as the maritime swamp forest and the maritime shrub swamp.

Nags Head Woods harbors trees up to 500 years old as well as very rare plant species. About 50 species of birds nest there. Nags Head Woods has about five miles of trails open from dawn to dusk. You can visit 7 days a week. Pick up a trail map at the kiosk. Restrooms are available only during office hours. To get there follow US 158 to Kill Devil Hills. Near mile post 9 1/2, turn west onto Ocean Acres Drive. Travel one mile to the forest at 701 Ocean Acres Drive. Call (252) 441-2525 for more details.

David Goforth

Garden Spot



Tune in to "In the Garden with Bryce Lane" every Saturday at Noon on UNC-TV. Check your local listings for other dates/times.

Successful GardenerSM newsletter is provided to you compliments of:

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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Raleigh, NC 27695-7603

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