

Successful Gardener

NC STATE UNIVERSITY NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

Sunflowers Live Up to Their Namesake

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

Sunflowers are the quintessential flower of summer. Whether they are dotting the landscape with their golden orbs or adding a festive touch to a picnic bouquet, they can't help but inspire smiles.

Sunflowers are in the genus *Helianthus*, a large group consisting of more than 150 species of annuals and perennials. The perennial species are easy to care for, needing full sun and protection from the wind. Most thrive in well-drained soils, but some species are well adapted to wet conditions. Many perennial species can be considered aggressive spreaders in the garden although we commonly overlook any inconvenience due to the beauty of the blooms whenever they appear.

One spectacular species to consider is *H. maximilianii* or Maximillian sunflower, a quick-growing perennial reaching about 10 feet tall and covered with numerous golden yellow flowers in the late summer and fall. This sunflower is great when used for fresh cut flowers. The bloom ranges from 4 to 6 inches in diameter, and the long, thin leaves reach about 8 inches in length. *H. angustifolius* or swamp sunflower is another similar species found in North Carolina in moist soils and ditches. *Helianthus x multiflorus* is one of the most interesting *Helianthus* hybrids available. It is a clumping perennial, reaching 6 feet in height and spreading about 3 feet wide. The full flowers are domed and can reach 6 inches in diameter. The most common cultivars are 'Capenoch Star', 'Loddon Gold' and 'Soleil d'Or'.

Among the annuals to consider are 'Autumn Beauty' and 'Teddy Bear'. Both are smaller than the common annual sunflower, which can reach 10 feet tall. Their smaller size makes them perfect for home gardeners.

To see the beauty and impact of sunflowers in a mixed border, visit the JC Raulston Arboretum. Eight different *Helianthus* species and hybrids reside in the mixed perennial border adjacent to the All-America Trial Garden.

Diane Ashburn Turner

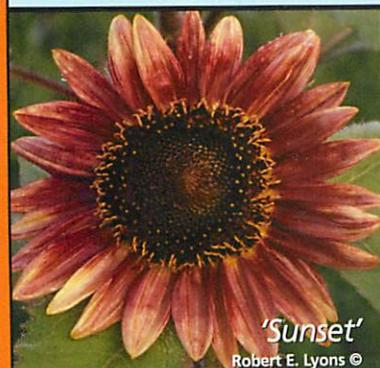


'Velvet Queen'
Robert E. Lyons ©

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'Sunset'
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Maximillian Sunflower
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'Big Smile'
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Plan Now for Fall Lawn Care

Summer's heat and dry weather takes its toll on turfgrasses that normally prefer lower temperatures and moist soil. Fortunately, the thought of a lush green lawn doesn't have to be just a dream. A beautiful lawn next spring begins this fall, and now is the time to plan for fall lawn care.

Start by evaluating your ground. Take the time to test the soil if you have neglected applying limestone for a few years. A soil report will recommend the fertilizer needed for a healthy, growing lawn.

Clay soils are often compacted due to foot traffic and mowing equipment. If you plan to renovate an existing lawn, consider aerification before overseeding. The benefits of aerification include improved water penetration into the soil, increased oxygen levels for the roots and better root development. The best aerating equipment removes cores or plugs of soil, increasing germination of seed while improving soil structure. Well-aerated soils help the grass roots go deeper, and the lawn will better survive a drought.

Some people prefer to hire a professional to aerate their lawn since it can be physically challenging. Do-it-yourselfers can contact a rental company for the availability of equipment.

When the aerification step is complete, remove excess thatch. You will now have a good environment in which to broadcast seeds. Many of the seeds fall into the holes and will sprout promptly following a couple weeks of daily irrigation. Follow these steps for more details on renovation.

Renovating an Existing Lawn

- Early fall is the best time to renovate fescue lawns.
- If using a herbicide, remember to use postemergence chemicals 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 at least 3 pounds per 1,000 square feet of area.
- Keep renovated area moist with light sprinklings of water twice daily. As the seed germinates, reduce the frequency of watering but increase the length of time or duration of each watering.

- Mow the renovated lawn at a height of 2.5 to 3.5 inches.

Caring for an Established Lawn

- If you have not had a soil test, 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. Fertilize the fescue lawn in September, November and March, using 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of lawn. (See Determining Fertilizer Requirements in screened box below for more information.)
- Continue to water the lawn in the fall, applying one inch of water per week early in the morning.
- For weed problems, spot treat with a broad-leaf herbicide this fall. Be sure to follow the label directions.
- Core aerate compacted lawns to move air and water down to the roots, then seed if necessary. 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.

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 less frequently.
- Begin mowing when grass is about 4 inches high.

Toby Bost

Determining Fertilizer Requirements

To apply 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet, divide 100 by the first number on the fertilizer bag to determine the amount of product to be used per 1,000 square feet. For example, if the bag says 16-4-8, divide 100 by 16, which equals 6.25. Therefore, 6.25 pounds of fertilizer per 1,000 square feet will deliver 1 pound of nitrogen.

gardentalk



"Perhaps Nature's best paean to the sun is the flower that so closely resembles it – the sunflower."

Deborah Grandinetti
in "Sunflowers"

Q & A

What's the best way to discourage snakes from taking up residence around my home?

The best way to discourage them is to control rodents, the diet of choice for snakes. Trim lower branches of shrubs, mow grass regularly to keep it short, and remove brush, leaf piles, logs, boards or other hiding places that attract both rodents and snakes. Place all rodent food sources such as grass seed, bird food, flower bulbs and pet food in secure metal containers. Clean up pet feeding areas after each meal.

Cooperative Extension Centers often receive calls from citizens about repelling snakes. Turns out that many of the control methods some people believe will work are simply myths or "old wife's tales."

Mothballs or flakes (composed of naphthalene or paradichlorobenzene) do not deter a snake hunting mice or seeking a cool hiding place. Mothballs are a potential poisoning hazard to small children and pets.

Sulfur will not repel snakes. If a snake crosses the sulfur barrier, sulfur will embed under the scales and cause irritation, potentially making an otherwise harmless snake ill tempered and aggressive.

Lime has never proven effective at repelling snakes. When hydrated lime, also called quick lime, encounters moisture it can cause severe skin burns to wildlife, pets and people. *Peggy Drechsler*

Enjoy North Carolina Wines

The wine industry in North Carolina is growing and now ranks 12th in the nation for wine production. Currently the state is home to 55 wineries, with projections that there will be 60 by year's end. In just four short years, the number has doubled, resulting in more choices for consumers.

N.C. Cooperative Extension assists this growing industry with site analysis, training, planting methods, testing new varieties and developing pest management strategies to produce premium quality wine grapes.

In 2004, the value in terms of income to growers was \$3.4 million and about \$34 million to wineries. This translates to an economic boost for many rural areas of the state, where most vineyards and wineries are located. These businesses create tourism-based jobs and the need for all the amenities that are necessary when tourists visit the region: gas, restaurants and lodging. Other tourist sites, crafters and farmers' markets also experience increased visits and sales.

It is a treat to visit the many wineries in the state and there are at least a few within a day's driving distance from just about anywhere in the state, making them a perfect weekend destination.

Visit www.ncwine.org/events.html for upcoming wine events. *Terry Garwood*

ENVIRO-TIP

Irrigation Tips for Wise Water Use

With water restrictions becoming more common in cities across the state, the proper use of irrigation systems is critical. There are ways to apply irrigation water efficiently and effectively. An example of one proper irrigation method is to water based on plant needs. Do not assume all plants need the same amount or frequency of water. The best landscapes are those in which plants that have similar water requirements are grouped together in planting zones.

Once a tree or shrub that is planted in the low-water-use zone has made it through the initial 12- to 18-month establishment period, there may be little or no need for supplemental water so an irrigation system may not be needed in these areas. Many of these areas are watered via the garden hose in the first year.

Moderate-water-use plants will need water only during stressful times of the year, during the heat of summer and when rainfall is scarce. A seasonal system, such as

a soaker hose or hand watering with a garden hose, may be all that is needed to manage plants in the moderate-use area.

At the extreme end of irrigation is the high-water-use zone, which might include the lawn, annual flower beds or other plants with high moisture needs. The high-use areas may need a permanent automated irrigation system. For high-water-use areas, there are several different types of systems. The choice includes a drip system that applies irrigation water to an individual plant; a system with a choice of spray heads and precipitation rate nozzles that waters groups of plants; and the turf-type spray head system.

The key to wise water use is to water infrequently and for a longer duration, just to the point of runoff and no more than 1 inch per week. This is an approximate amount of water required for lawns and may require more or less in your setting.

Stephen Greer



Robert E. Lyons ©



Purple Leaf Grapes
Robert E. Lyons ©

Gardening in August

Lawns

- Check lawn for grubs and treat only if necessary.
- Fertilize Bermuda and zoysia for the last time this month.
- In late August, prepare the lawn area for seeding if you plan to have a tall fescue lawn.
- Test soil. Most grasses need a pH of 6.5 for good root growth and nutrient uptake.

Ornamentals

- Divide irises and daylilies during this dormant season.
- Make last application of fertilizer to roses.
- Check conifers such as junipers and arborvitae for spider mites and treat with Orthene, horticultural oils or with insecticidal soap.
 - Deadhead annuals to encourage late-season blooms.
 - Get ready! Fall is the best time to plant trees and shrubs in the landscape. Analyze your site to see how you can enhance your landscape.

Edibles

- Consider planting these vegetables this month: beets, Chinese cabbage, cucumbers, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, radish, rutabaga, spinach, squash, turnips, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and collards.
 - Strawberries will benefit from a feeding of nitrogen.
 - Vegetables still need one inch of water each week.
 - Check regularly for insects such as cabbage worms, aphids, pickleworms and squash vine borers.
 - Harvest crops on a regular basis and don't forget to donate extra harvest to your local "Plant a Row for the Hungry" program or food pantry.

Mark Your Calendars

- *Extension's Successful Gardener* Learning Center will be at the Southern Ideal Home Show at the State Fairgrounds in Raleigh, Sept. 22-24. **Karen Neill**

An increasingly popular tourist destination in the state is the **Yadkin Valley**, quickly becoming known for its many vineyards and 18 wineries. With the designation as North Carolina's first American Viticultural Area (AVA), the Yadkin Valley AVA covers all of Wilkes, Surry and Yadkin counties, and parts of Stokes, Forsyth, Davie and Davidson counties. The Yadkin Valley has a unique blend of climate and soils that produces world-class wines.

Pick a day and set off to explore the region and enjoy its panoramic views of the Piedmont foothills. Take advantage of the many tours and wine tastings offered in beautiful settings. Many of the wineries encourage picnicking and some feature outdoor concerts.

Learn more about the Yadkin Valley wine region at www.yadkinwines.com. Click on wineries' Web sites for event information. For more information on North Carolina wines visit www.ncwine.org.

Amy-Lynn Albertson

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