

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

JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

## Fringe Tree a Natural for Carolina Landscapes

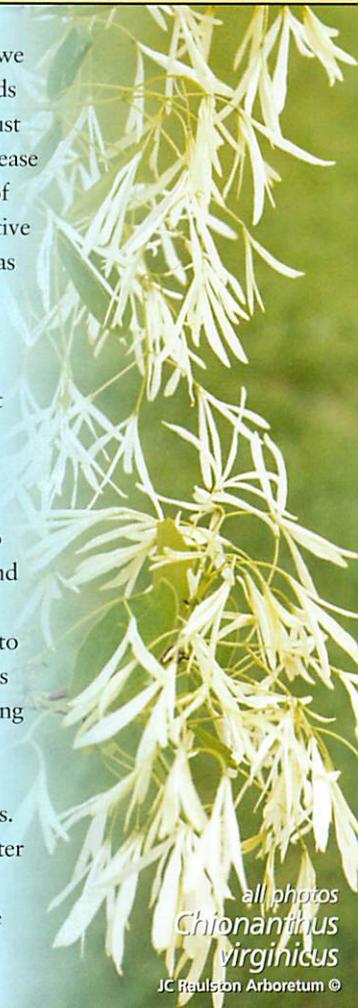
**N**ative trees are excellent choices for North Carolina landscapes since we know they have survived the stresses of our environment for hundreds of years. Most of us, however, usually want a tree to do more than just survive. We often look for trees that can fit into smaller spaces, have few disease and insect problems and offer a feature that gives them special interest. All of these criteria describe the fringe tree, *Chionanthus virginicus*. This tree is native to North Carolina with a range from New Jersey to Florida and as far west as Arkansas and Texas. In the wild it grows along streambanks and wetlands.

The fringe tree is considered a large shrub or small tree that can grow to about 20 feet in height and width at maturity. The tree produces dark green glossy leaves in the spring, along with beautiful, slightly fragrant flowers that feature airy, drooping, four- to six-inch-long clusters of fringe-like, creamy white petals. These flowers give the tree its common name as well as other names such as old man's beard. When in bloom, the entire tree looks like it is glowing due to the soft airy nature of the flowers. The flowers give way to clusters of olive-like fruits that ripen to a dark, bluish black in late summer and are a food source for birds and other wildlife.

The fringe tree grows easily in moist, fertile, well-drained soil in full sun to partial shade. It may be difficult to transplant specimens once established. It's best to plant balled-and-burlapped or container-grown plants early in the spring in a well prepared site. The tree seldom needs pruning and is a beautiful specimen shrub. It also does well in groups, borders or near large buildings. Because it is tolerant of air pollution, it can thrive along streets and highways. The slow-growing nature of this tree results in strong, dense wood that is better able to withstand the bending stresses associated with wind and ice storms.

*Chionanthus virginicus* is an excellent choice for the urban landscape, the native garden, container planting or as a utilitarian tree under power lines.

Carl Matyac



all photos  
*Chionanthus virginicus*  
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inside

2

Five Common Tree Myths

3

Enviro-Tip

4

Garden Spot

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Don't use tree paint.



Don't top trees.



Don't use excess mulch.

## Five Common Tree Myths

Trees enhance our lives in many ways. They are great gifts of nature, and they add beauty and value to our homes and communities.

Unfortunately, there are lots of myths about tree care, and a drive through some communities will readily prove that many people believe these myths. For your trees' sake, learn about proper tree care. Here are five common tree myths.

**Myth:** Prune one-third of shade tree branches when planting to balance the top with the roots.

**Fact:** Most nurseries produce quality plants that are suitable without major early pruning. If it's necessary to prune newly planted shade trees, it should be to develop an early framework. Even in this instance, never remove one-third of the branches. Selectively remove branches that are too close, crossing, rubbing or are excessive parallels. Don't follow the one-third removal practice.

**Myth:** Tree seal, wound dressing or paint prevent disease, decay and insects, plus they help heal pruning cuts.

**Fact:** Tree seals, dressings and paint do not help. There is actually evidence that sealing over a fresh cut traps moisture and can accelerate decay. By leaving wounds open a tree's natural defense for healing will work as intended.

**Myth:** You can add soil around trees to build up the ground for planting flowers and small shrubs.

**Fact:** Leave the soil grade surrounding and underneath trees the same. When excessive soil is placed over the root system the oxygen level is depleted and the roots suffocate. This can result in severe decline or even death of the tree. For conserving moisture, reducing traffic compaction and suppressing weed competition, use a two- to four-inch layer of organic mulch. Excess mulch can cause problems with rodents, root suffocation and tree trunk deterioration. Always leave a gap between

the trunk and mulch and avoid the temptation of preparing a flowerbed under a tree's canopy.

**Myth:** Tree company ads in the newspaper and yellow pages must mean that the company has experts on tree care.

**Fact:** Anyone can run ads but that doesn't mean they are an expert. Decisions are often driven by what you as a customer want. Tree topping is a prime example. Severe topping is the beginning of decline and death of many shade trees. The customer normally pays twice – once for topping and later for removal. If knowledge is lacking as to the best interest of the trees, begin by considering only the International Society of Arboriculture's (ISA) certified arborists. This group of worldwide professionals is dedicated to fostering a greater appreciation of trees and proper tree care. Log on to [www.isa-arbor.com](http://www.isa-arbor.com). Obtaining a list with contact information is as simple as typing in your zip code for those nearest you. Obtain at least several references and follow-up. Always require insurance certificates, detailed procedure and a written contract. And remember, anyone who recommends or agrees to top your trees is not a professional.

**Myth:** Anybody can plant a tree correctly.

**Fact:** The idea that you can dig a hole and place manure or compost around the side of the roots and your tree will be happy is wrong. Start the process with a soil and site assessment. Consider the tree's mature height and spread. People often make the mistake of planting in holes that are not the right size for the tree. **Donald Breedlove**

An excellent tree planting guide is available free from your local Cooperative Extension Center or at [www.successfulgardener.org](http://www.successfulgardener.org).

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## The Majestics

A lot of Americans want instant gratification, even with landscaping. If you have enough money, you can pretty much achieve that goal. But majestic old trees don't grow overnight.

Majestic giants provide some benefits that small trees simply can't duplicate. Besides their

sheer beauty, they produce wonderful shade and give off large amounts of oxygen.

One of the most spectacular native trees for which the term majestic truly fits is the white oak. Unfortunately, the species is slow growing

see **The Majestics** on page 3 ▶

## gardentalk

"The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is now."

Anonymous



## Q&A What does it mean to top trees and is it harmful?

Topping is the nonselective removal of the tree branches from the main canopy of the tree back to stubs or lateral branches. This is very stressful and harmful to the tree, and can lead to decay. Topping triggers a mechanism in the tree to produce many new shoots from dormant leaf buds on the branches throughout the tree. These shoots are weak and poorly connected to the tree as opposed to new shoots that naturally emerge at the end of the limbs if left undisturbed. In short, topping results in an unsightly, unnatural-looking tree, not at all what Mother Nature intended. Don't top trees!

Many people are under the impression

that large shade trees need pruning because they are so big. If you watch nature, it is a balance of limb to trunk to root system. These trees have made it in the wild for a reason. All trees need selective pruning to remove a specific limb, but do a little research and talk with a certified arborist before making any decisions. Don't let the person knocking at your door or the neighbor down the street push you into a knee-jerk reaction.

If you have questions about pruning a tree, contact your county Cooperative Extension Center or a certified arborist. If you are planning to plant trees, avoid future problems by analyzing your site.

*Stephen Greer*

## The Majestics

*continued from page 2*

and often not available at nurseries and garden centers. You may want to consider planting the faster growing and readily available willow oak.

Red maples can also make some nice trees in the wild. For new plantings, consider the named cultivars of red maple and its hybrids. Look for names such as 'October Glory' and 'Autumn Blaze'. Depending upon the part of the state you live in and the exact attributes you're looking for, you might consider species such as pecans or Canadian hemlocks.

Remember that these trees need lots of room. A mature willow oak may grow to 60 to 80 feet high and have a spread of 40 to 50 feet. Modern housing lots don't always allow space for their planting. But if you're building on a property where there is sufficient room, plant a large tree or two for posterity. If you're building on a site where large trees already exist, check to see if some are in a location where they can be left and make sure your contractor takes steps to protect them.

For more information on the characteristics of large-growing trees, check out Cooperative Extension's Horticulture Information Leaflet 638, "Large Trees for North Carolina." It's available at [www.ncstate-plants.net](http://www.ncstate-plants.net) or from your county Cooperative Extension Center.

*Kevin Starr*

## ENVIRO-TIP Trees, Please!

Trees do so much more than look good. Trees can save you money, and they enhance our communities and the environment. Think about this the next time you are out raking leaves.

Trees, and plants in general, use carbon dioxide to produce the oxygen we breathe. They help purify water, reduce water runoff, stabilize soil and moderate temperature. They provide habitats for wildlife, especially birds and small mammals.

Trees shade homes in summer and block winter winds, resulting in serious savings in heating and cooling. According to the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, the evaporation from a single large tree can produce the cooling effect of 10 room-size air conditioners operating 24 hours per day. Homeowners who properly place trees in their landscape can realize savings up to 58 percent on daytime air conditioning. Trees also reduce air pollution by trapping and holding particle pollutants and by absorbing

some dangerous gases. In turn, an acre of trees produces enough oxygen for 18 people every day.

Trees provide benefits to communities in other ways. Instead of harboring would-be criminals, trees may reduce crime. A University of Illinois study found that residents living in "greener surroundings" report lower levels of fear, fewer incivilities and less violent behavior. They found that the greener a building's surroundings, the fewer reported crimes.

Trees contribute in other ways as well. The symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) are relieved after contact with nature, and the greener the setting, the more relief, according to Frances Kuo with the University of Illinois. She and other researchers found that trees and greenery help residents of buildings know their neighbors better, socialize with them more often and feel safer. Take these facts to your next garden party, hopefully under the shade of a backyard tree. *Mark Blevins*



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## Gardening in October

### Lawns

- Early October is a good time to overseed your cool-season lawn. Use a core aerator to pull plugs from the soil. This will improve soil structure. Reducing soil compaction will encourage better root growth.
- Tall fescue blends with two or more hybrids will perform better than a single seed variety. Use a rate of 6 pounds per 1,000 square feet when overseeding. Higher seeding rates will cause overcrowding and poor results. Look for variety recommendations at [www.turffiles.ncsu.edu](http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu).

### Ornamentals

- As trees mature, their roots increase in diameter and may be exposed above the soil surface. If tree roots interfere with lawn mowing, consider eliminating the turf around the trees and mulch that area. This will prevent the lawn mower from damaging the roots and will help conserve moisture.

- Be careful when planting annuals around trees. Most of a tree's feeder roots are found in the top 6 to 8 inches of soil. Rototilling for a flowerbed may injure shallow tree roots.

- Avoid covering tree roots with soil to create flowerbeds. Roots can be suffocated with too much fill. Limit soil additions to a 3-inch depth and keep filled areas to less than 20 percent of the root zone.

### Edibles

- Remove vegetable plants that have finished producing for the season. Leaving these plants in the garden may increase insect and disease problems next year.
- Plant cover crops like rye or crimson clover where you have removed vegetable crops. This will help prevent erosion in the garden and will add valuable organic matter when turned under in the spring.

*Mark Danieley*

Many landscapers and gardeners forgo using native plants in a "natural" landscape because they are uncomfortable straying from the traditional plantings or styles with which they are most familiar. **A landscape at the Turner House on the North Carolina State University campus** provides plenty of ideas. Faculty and students created a landscape that demonstrates how to choose and design plantings to attract wildlife.

Before landscape improvements were made, the grounds surrounding the Turner House were covered mostly with mulch and gravel. Now, the landscape contains more than 45 species of native plants situated along a walking path that ends at a small pond and bog garden. The Turner House, home to the University's Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences program, is located at the corner of Brooks Avenue and Hillsborough Street in Raleigh and is open to the public. A free brochure and plant identification tags facilitate a self-guided tour.

*Chris Moorman*

In The Garden  
with Bryce Lane

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