

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

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JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

Agaves Provide Structural Impact & Boldness

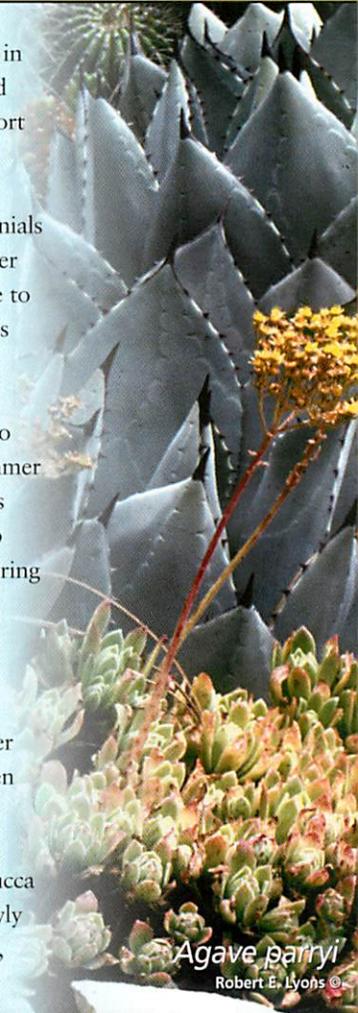
Great structure, unique foliage and a flower stalk that stretches 40 feet in the air are a few features of agaves. Sometimes described as fierce and outspoken, agaves give great bones to the body of your garden, support gardening style in the heat of summer and keep their composure through winter rain and snow.

Often called “century plants,” this genus is comprised of succulent perennials that patiently grow and accumulate their reserves to put out one grand flower show. Flowering doesn't take 100 years. They will typically hold out for five to 10 seasons before producing a monstrosity tall stalk of yellow flowers that is well worth the wait – a great gardening event! The offsets or “pups” are produced as the original expires.

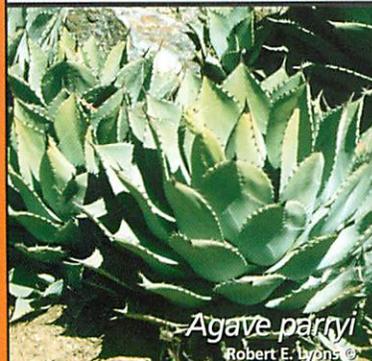
Agaves are found native in the most challenging desert habitats of Mexico and the southwestern United States. They can survive the hottest, driest summer that North Carolina can bring. Agaves will benefit from as much sunshine as you can afford and respond well to fertilizer and water in the summer. Keep their feet from staying wet; agaves require very good drainage, especially during our cool, wet winters.

Sunny spots and rock gardens are great places for agaves. Larger species such as *Agave americana* grow five feet wide and produce tall flower spikes, while smaller versions and other species, such as *Agave parryi*, can display a more compact stature with equally beautiful, although slightly shorter, flower stalks. Select silver, blue or variegated leaves and colorful spines to draw even more attention to this succulent, no matter the size.

JC Raulston Arboretum's (JCRA) Southwest Garden is a great place to check out a variety of hardy agaves. There are other woody lilies, such as yucca and beargrass, along with some cacti in the collection. Also look for the newly constructed rock garden on the west side of the McSwain Education Center, which features various agaves and other rock garden plants. **Mark Blevins**



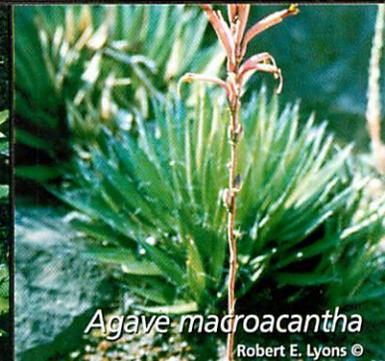
Agave parryi
Robert E. Lyons ©



Agave parryi
Robert E. Lyons ©



Agave macroacantha
Robert E. Lyons ©



Agave macroacantha
Robert E. Lyons ©



Visit North Carolina Choose-and-Cut Tree Farms

One of North Carolina's premier industries is gearing up for its busy season. The day after the turkey and pumpkin pie have been consumed, North Carolina's choose-and-cut Christmas tree farms will be open for business. While some folks choose to hit the day-after-Thanksgiving sales, many families decide to make the pilgrimage to their favorite Christmas tree farm for a day of fresh air and Christmas spirit.

While Fraser fir trees make up about 90 percent of all of the Christmas trees grown in North Carolina, other species of trees can be found, depending on the region of the state and the price that one wishes to pay. The Fraser fir is king in western North Carolina and its dark green needles and perfect shape are hard to beat. For folks who are looking for something a little different, the piedmont and eastern areas of North Carolina produce primarily white pine and red cedar. The family that wishes to plant its tree after the holidays would do well with Norway spruce, hemlock or Deodar cedar.

The choose-and-cut business has grown through the years, and while the tree lot located on the corner can be an adequate source for the family tree, North Carolinians have discovered that a family outing to the tree farm to choose and cut their own tree can be an activity that every member of the family can take part in and enjoy. Today, 25 percent of all Christmas trees come from choose-and-cut farms. There are more than 400 choose-and-cut tree growers across North Carolina and they are experts in making their farms an attractive and inviting spot for a family outing.

Choose-and-cut farms are more than a place to buy a Christmas tree. They are destinations that can provide everything from sleigh rides and hay rides to hot apple cider, hot chocolate and marshmallows

roasted on a stick over an open fire. Hikes through endless fields of trees surrounded by spectacular views on all sides are the norm for western North Carolina tree farms and the photo opportunities are many and varied. Santa, Mrs. Claus and the occasional Christmas elf have been known to put in an appearance. Some farms boast petting zoos and craft shops as well as accessories for Christmas decorating such as wreaths and garlands.

Most farms have netting machines and employees who are available to load and secure the tree once it has been chosen. Some even offer the service of putting the tree into its stand before it leaves the farm on its way to a new home. Tree shoppers should think ahead, however, and drive an appropriate vehicle that is capable of hauling a Christmas tree.

Most choose-and-cut farms offer pre-tagging options, especially if a large tree is desired. The tree hunter makes an appointment to come and tag a tree in the fall or late summer and is assured that the perfect tree will be waiting when he comes back after Thanksgiving.

How does one know which tree farm is best for his family's needs? There are numerous Web sites that list hours of operation, directions, telephone numbers and special amenities. Some of the most helpful are www.nc-chooseandcut.com (eastern N.C.), www.ncchristmastrees.com (western N.C.) and www.ncagr.com/markets/gginc/store/index.htm, which is the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services site for Goodness Grows in North Carolina.

Take some family time this holiday season for a day of fun. At the same time, you will be supporting an important North Carolina home-grown industry.

Donna Teasley

Meet the Alliums

November is the time to plant spring-flowering bulbs but what about bulbs you eat? When growing plants for their bulbs instead of for flowers, the timing isn't as critical. In particular, onions are sometimes planted later so they won't be as likely to develop a flower head, which reduces quality. An October/November planting date works for onions, *Allium cepa*; elephant garlic, *Allium ampeloprasum*; and garlic, *Allium sativum*. Onion sets can be planted anytime from September through February, although stores often don't stock them until late winter.

Good onion cultivars from sets include 'Silverskin' (or 'White

Portugal'), 'Yellow Globe Danvers' and 'Ebenezer'. While a fall planting could work for ramps, *Allium tricocca*, and shallots, *Allium cepa*, these are normally planted in the spring. Leeks, *Allium porrum*, are traditionally planted in the spring but piedmont gardeners can plant certain varieties in the fall.

Other closely related plants include Ramsons garlic, *Allium ursinum*; crow garlic, *Allium vineale*; and garlic chives, *Allium tuberosum*. Plant these in fall or spring. There are 8 different groups of garlic: Asiatic, Creole, purple stripe, marbled purple stripe, porcelain, artichoke, silverskin and rocambole. Avoid planting the Creole types of garlic (also called Early,

see Meet the Alliums on page 3 ▶

Q&A

Is there anything I should change in my houseplant care routine in the winter?

Yes, all indoor plants need a rest period during the year. Plants will show subtle changes such as dieback or leaf drop but this is not always evident with all plant species. During the winter, reduce the amount of watering and feed given to each plant based on plant species. Houseplants can sense a change in the number of natural light hours. This is the primary reason these plants need a period of rest. When the light hours increase again, plants will put out new growth, a sure sign that it is time to resume your houseplant care routine.

During winter, houseplants can suffer from low humidity. Centralized heating systems cause dryness in indoor environments. Plants will exhibit such symptoms as brown and shriveled leaf tips, yellow leaf edges,

wilting and leaf and bud desiccation. Raise the humidity around your indoor plants by misting plants in the morning hours with water or grouping plants together and placing them on a shallow tray filled with 1 inch of pebbles spread evenly and kept wet. Don't let the water exceed the height of the pebbles.

Plants that are allowed to get too cold will show signs of leaf curl followed by browning and leaf desiccation. Move houseplants away from the window seal during the winter months. Even the best-insulated windows regulate outdoor temperatures more poorly than the worst insulated wall.

Learn more about houseplants at www.ncstate-plants.net. Click on Consumer Horticulture Leaflets.

Michelle Wallace

ENVIRO-TIP

Avoid Using Wood Chips to Prevent Artillery Fungus

During spring, summer and fall, county Cooperative Extension Centers often receive numerous calls regarding an abundance of small, round, "tar-like" spots appearing on house siding and car surfaces. Callers guess the cause being anything from insect feces to pollution falling from the sky. The true cause of these hard-to-remove spots is a fungus, *Sphaerobolus stellatus*, also known as the "cannon" or "artillery" fungus. The fungus produces an "egg" that may be ejected up to 14 feet from the fruiting body. The "egg" has an oily or sticky substance that enables it to adhere to most surfaces it encounters. Once stuck to a surface, the "egg" dries to form a disk shape and adheres very strongly.

Environmental conditions with high moisture and temperatures ranging from 70 to 80 degrees F will

promote fruiting body development in the spring and fall. The fungus is phototropic which means the "egg" is shot toward a light source when environmental temperatures reach 90 degrees.

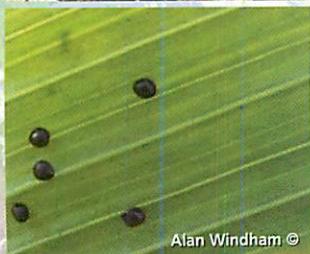
Artillery fungus grows primarily on decaying wood chips, twigs or corn cobs. The apparent increase in occurrence of this fungus is attributed to the increased use of wood chips as mulch in landscapes. If you look closely at the areas where the spots are located, there probably will be mulch within 15 feet of the spots.

To prevent artillery fungus problems, avoid using wood chips as mulch. Use pine or hardwood bark mulch as an alternative because they are not as likely to harbor this fungus. No fungicides are labeled to control this landscape problem.

Diane Ashburn Turner



Alan Windham ©



Alan Windham ©

Meet the Alliums

continued from page 2



Garlic Chives
Robert E. Lyons ©

Louisiana and White Mexican) in western North Carolina because they are not very winter-hardy and do not store well. Recommended commercial varieties for North Carolina include 'German Extra-Hardy', many of the Italian varieties and 'New York White Neck'.

Information on planting onions, ramps and garlic is available on the NC State Web site at www.ncstate-plants.net. Like other bulbs, onions and garlic need fairly fertile soils with a good pH. One of the most important cultural practices is replacing nitrogen in the soil after it leaches out during winter rains. Plan to sidedress at least twice with nitrogen fertilizer.

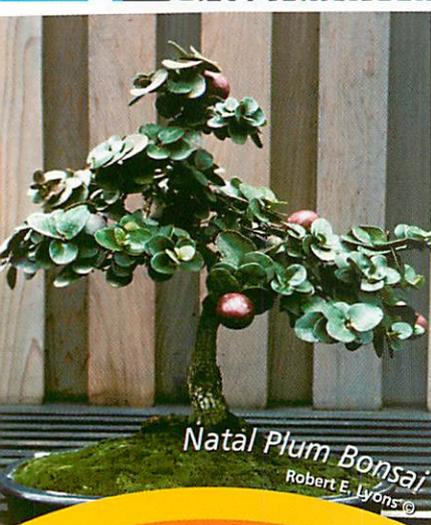
David Goforth

gardentalk



"But see, in our open clearings, how golden the melons lie; Enrich them with sweets and spices, and give us the pumpkin pie!"

Margaret Junkin Preston



Garden Spot

North Carolina has many places throughout the state where you can either visit a bonsai collection or participate in groups that practice this ancient art. The most extensive collection is located at **The North Carolina Arboretum in Asheville**. The Arboretum's bonsai collection is botanically diverse. Represented are traditional Asian plants such as Japanese maple and Chinese elm. Of particular importance are the plants natural to the Blue Ridge region, such as American hornbeam and eastern white pine, which enable the Arboretum to bring the thousand-year tradition of bonsai home to the mountains of North Carolina. Visit the North Carolina Arboretum at www.ncarboretum.org for details. Another site is the North Carolina Botanical Garden in Chapel Hill. Visit www.ncbg.unc.edu for classes and workshops. Also learn about the American Bonsai Society at www.absbonsai.org where you will also find information on North Carolina clubs.

Stephen Greer

Aaron Lancaster

Gardening in November

Lawns

- Apply 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of established cool-season turfgrass. A November application of fertilizer promotes root development in cool-season grasses without excessive top growth.
- Remove fallen leaves from lawns as soon as possible to provide ample sunlight for newly seeded and established lawns.
- When warm-season lawns go dormant, treat winter annual weeds with a selective herbicide.
- Continue to mow and water lawns during dry weather.

Ornamentals

- Tree banding for the fall cankerworm can be successful if done by whole neighborhoods immediately following the first winter cold snaps, usually the third or fourth week in November. Check banding traps often so they remain sticky. Remove them in March.
 - Group potted plants together to give them the benefit of increased humidity, but avoid overcrowding.
 - When transplanting shrubs and trees, be careful not to expose the roots to drying winds or too much sunlight, which puts undue stress on the plant.
 - Roots of woody ornamentals used as container plants may be killed if soil temperatures drop below 25°F. Aucuba, English boxwood, camellia, pampas grass, bearberry, cotoneaster, English holly, Japanese holly, star magnolia and nandina are among the least cold-hardy.

Edibles

- Remove dead plants from the garden to prevent or reduce next season's pest problems.
- Remove older canes on blackberries and raspberries.
- If a soil test indicates need for a higher pH, apply dolomitic limestone now so fall rain and winter snow can incorporate it into the soil.

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