

NC STATE UNIVERSITY NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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

inside

2

Fall Is the
Time to
Renovate
Lawns

3

Enviro-Tip

4

Garden
Spot

JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

Heuchera Provides Bold, Colorful Foliage

Heuchera is an interesting family of perennials that is comprised of more than 50 species that are native to North America. *Heuchera*, commonly known as coralbells or alumroot, is hardy from zones 4 to 9 depending on species and cultivar.

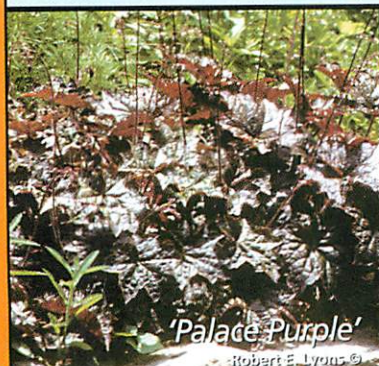
Coralbells and alumroot are primarily grown for their foliage, but many species also have attractive flowers that are favored by butterflies. Flowering usually begins in June and continues throughout the growing season. Depending on the variety selected, coralbells can grow in sun or shade. Many varieties develop their best leaf color in full sun. They prefer moist, well-drained soils that have been amended with organic matter like leaf compost or pine bark fines. There are few insect or disease problems, but leaf scorch can be a problem for plants grown in the full sun during hot, dry conditions.

The increased interest in coralbells was sparked when *Heuchera micrantha* 'Palace Purple' was selected by the Perennial Plant Association as Perennial of the Year in 1991. They make a wonderful addition to the garden and can be used as edgings in perennial borders and group plantings. The lighter colored varieties stand out nicely in a lightly shaded garden.

'Palace Purple' is perhaps the best-known variety, but there are a number of new varieties on the market that are worth considering for your garden. *Heuchera* 'Amber Waves' has true amber-colored foliage that is brightest in the spring and darkens through the season. *Heuchera* 'Canyon Belle' has clusters of bright red flowers above green foliage and works well in the shade garden. *Heuchera* 'Green Spice' has green leaves with dark purple veins that turn amber in the fall. *Heuchera* 'Plum Pudding' has excellent shiny deep purple foliage with pinkish-white blooms.

The JC Raulston Arboretum (JCRA) has a number of species on display including *H. americana*, *H. richardsonii* and *H. villosa* as well as several hybrids. Plan on touring the JCRA the next time you are in Raleigh for ideas on how to use *Heuchera* in the garden. **Mark Danieley**

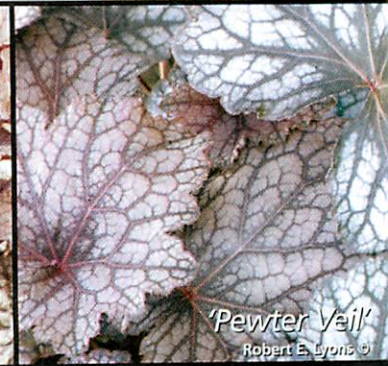
'Palace Purple'
Robert E. Lyons ©



'Palace Purple'
Robert E. Lyons ©



'Pewter Veil'
Robert E. Lyons ©



'Pewter Veil'
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Fall Is the Time to Renovate Lawns

When normal maintenance of a lawn is not enough to meet your standard of quality, renovation may be the solution. A careful evaluation of your current situation is necessary to prevent the plant-hope-fail-replant ritual we often observe in home landscapes. Poor establishment procedures, improper management, poorly adapted grass species, improper nutrient balance, excessive thatch buildup, and disease, insect or weed buildup are primary causes of turf deterioration. Correct these problems before you begin applying seed.

Late summer to early fall is the best time to renovate cool-season lawns. Wait until late spring to early summer if you want a nice warm-season lawn. Planting at the correct time is a critical consideration.

Weed control will reduce competition with newly planted grass. If you have only a small number of weeds, hand pulling or use of a hoe or rake will suffice. Large areas of weeds are best controlled by using herbicides. The use of selective broadleaf herbicides is required 4 to 6 weeks before seeding. Most selective crabgrass killers also require 4 weeks or more before seeding. When faced with a high population of perennial grassy weeds, unwanted turfgrass, annual grasses and broadleaf weeds, use the nonselective herbicide glyphosate. If these weeds are present throughout the lawn, treat the entire area. Seven days is the optimum time to wait after applying glyphosate. This waiting period is necessary to allow proper movement of the herbicide into underground parts of the weeds. Herbicides are usually more effective if applied after the soil has been moist for several days.

To further eliminate competition set your mower at the lowest setting, mow and collect the clippings. Make several passes with a dethatcher or use hand tools for small areas. A dethatcher may not be necessary if you plan to use a slit seeder. Remove all dead grass, thatch and weeds until the soil is exposed. These measures reduce competition and increase light penetration, which result in good germination and fast establishment.

Apply fertilizer and lime according to the results of a soil test. Contact your county Cooperative Extension Center to learn how to submit a sample to the N.C. Department of Agriculture. The results of your test will include nitrogen, phosphorus, potash, lime and other nutrient recommendations that are needed for successful renovation.

Without a good seedbed the seed is best left in the bag. Seed scattered on a hard, compacted soil will not germinate or remain viable. Loosen the soil 4 to 6 inches deep using hand tools, a tiller or tractor-powered equipment. Fill in low areas and smooth the soil until you are sure future mowing will be free of bumps and obstructions. If your lawn has 50 percent or more of desirable turf, good results can be achieved by using a core aerator or coring machine that will pull up plugs of soil. Aerate extensively in several directions. Follow up by pulverizing the cores with a chain, light drag, mower or dethatcher. Core aeration is best done when the soil is damp.

Seeding is the next step. Replant bare spots larger than 4 inches in diameter. Fescue and perennial ryegrass are bunch-type plants and will not spread. Make your seed selection based on your environment. Use a rotary or drop spreader to apply half the seed in one direction and the other half at right angles to the first application. This will minimize the occurrence of bare spots. Incorporate seed into the top 1/8 inch of soil by lightly raking or, again, by pulling a chain, light drag or vertical cutter over loose soil. At this point many people feel the job should be complete. Take another deep breath and follow through with the final chore: mulching. I have encouraged countless home gardeners and landscapers not to leave out this crucial step just to save a little time and money. Your new lawn is likely doomed without mulch. Mulching is necessary for moisture retention and erosion management. Use clean, weed- and seed-free wheat or rye straw, Bermuda hay or cellulose mulch. With hay or straw, use 1 to 1 1/2 bales per 1,000 square feet, enough to allow the soil to barely be visible.

Keep your successful renovation moist with light irrigation several times a day. As growth begins and continues, shorten the frequency of watering but increase the duration to encourage deep root penetration. Plugging and sprigging are alternative methods of lawn renovation with warm-season grasses such as centipede, St. Augustine, zoysia and Bermuda. Ask your county Cooperative Extension Center for a copy of the newly revised *Carolina Lawns* to learn about these methods, cultivar selection, maintaining the lawn and integrated pest management. Search "Carolina Lawns" at www.turffiles.ncsu.edu for more information on turf establishment and maintenance. **Mike Wilder**

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Q&A

Why are all these ladybugs coming in my house?

As temperatures start to cool in the fall, adult Asian lady beetles begin their search for protected places to overwinter. These locations tend to be the sunnier or warmer sides of buildings, or on exposed, light-colored buildings. From the exterior of the building they may move indoors by crawling under defective weather stripping or by crawling and flying in open doors on warm days. The beetles can fit through very small gaps or cracks in siding, masonry, around window and door casings, and even through attic and soffit vents. The beetles hibernate as adults, usually in wall voids. However, they cannot survive long in the heated rooms of a house. On warm days, they may become active and often hundreds will congregate toward light or bright surfaces. Indoors, the

beetles are often found on windows, light fixtures and ceilings. The multicolored Asian lady beetle does not reproduce indoors. In spring, they will move outdoors in search of prey. Asian lady beetles are effective predators of aphids and some scale insects and are extremely beneficial for both agricultural and horticultural crops. A native of Asia, the beetle was released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the Southeast and in Washington. The insect was reportedly reintroduced accidentally from a freighter in the port of New Orleans and first reported in North Carolina in 1992. More information on Asian lady beetles can be found at <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/Other/goodpest/note107.html>

Darrell Blackwelder

ENVIRO- TIP

Mow Your Leaves

Many municipalities restrict the burning of leaves. It's not good for the environment, and why waste such a useful natural resource? My recommendation is to mow them.

Yes, there are times when they are too deep to mow effectively so I do the best I can by mowing them into a large pile with the discharge from the mower always aimed toward the center. When the pile of leaves is too big to mow I attach the grass catcher and bag the leaves and grass and add them to the compost pile. Everyone should have a compost bin!

There are several benefits to mowing leaves. Leaves contain all of the micronutrients that the tree has absorbed from the soil. Instead of sending them to the landfill, use the chopped up, nutrient-rich leaves in your landscape. Estimates show that mowing and using leaves adds about

25 percent of the fertility needs of the plant.

North Carolina has separated lawn waste from trash for several years now and municipalities and counties require them to be in separate landfills. By keeping lawn waste out of the landfill you will help reduce the taxes needed to build and maintain this separate landfill. The benefits are easy to see. By mowing and reusing leaves, you will help reduce the damage to the environment, save money and help feed your lawn and trees.

Terry Garwood



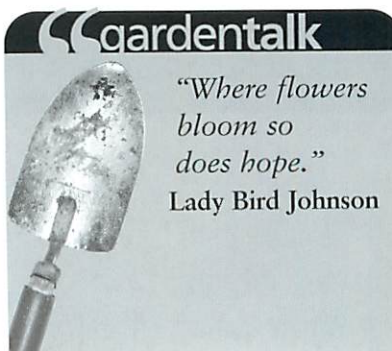
Natural Screens

Any plant that blocks a view can be a screening plant. People traditionally choose tall plants that have thick evergreen foliage. Constructing a fence or other hardscape structure to block the view allows the gardener more space to devote to plants. Another technique is to use a vine on a fence or trellis to block the view. This, too, has the advantage of taking up less space than traditional screening plants. While a single evergreen vine can be used, a diversity or mosaic of vines offers insect and disease resistance plus interest at different times during the year.

When using screening plants, some people demonstrate a tendency to choose one plant and stick with it for miles on end if necessary. This design increases insect and disease pressure. Choosing a diversity of plants reduces insect and disease pressure and reduces the likelihood of all the plants succumbing at the same time. For example, instead of planting 17 Leyland cypresses in a row, plant 1 wax myrtle, 5 Leyland cypresses, a wax myrtle, 3 Nellie Stevens hollies, a wax myrtle, 5 Leyland cypresses and another wax myrtle. This gives repetition and balance but also give diversity and contrast.

A list of traditional screening plants can be found at www.successfulgardener.org.

David Goforth





Gardening in September

Lawns

- Call or visit your local Cooperative Extension Center to pick up soil test boxes and instructions. It's easy and free.
- Warm-season grasses like centipede and Bermuda will begin to go dormant in the western parts of the state. Avoid fertilizing or liming unless your soil test indicates a need.
- Mow fescue to 3 inches through the fall and winter. Mow Bermuda to 1 1/2 inches; centipede from 1 inch to 1 1/2 inches; and zoysia to 1 inch.
- Fescues may still need water, particularly if you have newly seeded or reseeded lawns. One inch of water each week is needed. Warm-season grasses will need much less water as they go dormant.

Ornamentals

- If you need to prune, do so as early in the fall as possible. Prune lightly; heavy pruning can result in a flush of new growth that can be damaged in the coming winter.
 - Bring houseplants inside soon. Watch nighttime temperatures even while we have warm days. Temperatures in the 50s can damage some tropicals.
 - Deadhead your flowers as they fade and die back. Remove annuals when they look unsightly. Leave perennials to die back naturally. This feeds the roots and crown of the plant for the next season.
 - Clean up under your plantings. Diseases and insects can overwinter in plant debris.
 - Plant shrubs, trees and perennials now. Planting a tree? Take a look at *Extension's Successful Gardener Tree Planting Guide* at <http://www.successfulgardener.org/>.

Edibles

- Plant cool-season crops such as lettuce, cabbage, greens, onions and radishes.
- Fruit trees, brambles and grapevines will all benefit from a layer of new mulch. Leave a gap of 3 to 4 inches around the trunk to avoid creating a living space complete with food (tree bark) where little critters can hide. **Jeff Rieves**

Catawba Creek
Great Smoky Mountains

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park

encompasses more than 520,000 acres along high mountain ridges straddling the North Carolina-Tennessee border. The park was established in 1934 and is now designated as an International Biosphere Reserve and a World Heritage Site. These designations help protect the vast biological resources as well as the rich Appalachian cultural heritage. The park is home to one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world, including over 10,000 plant species.

Make your visit to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park as adventurous as you like. Drive the scenic roads and take in the magnificent overlook views, or set out on some of the 900 miles of hiking trails, including the Appalachian Trail. Peak wildflower season is April and May but in open meadows, such as in Cades Cove, blooms are found through fall. Come back in October for the spectacular fall color display.

For more information visit:
<http://www.nps.gov/grsm/>.

Linda Blue

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