



# Extension Gardener

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Winter 2015

Empowering gardeners. Providing garden solutions.

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## Winter pruning: know when and where to cut

**W**e prune for many reasons. Some are good, and others are not so good. The primary goal of pruning should be to enhance a plant's natural form, not to change a plant's size or shape. Yes, sometimes pruning is done to improve the shape of a shrub or tree. However, we need to remember we cannot force a plant to grow in a spot where there is not enough room. The task of keeping a camellia that naturally grows 8 feet tall pruned to a height of 4 feet is never going to end well.

Timing is another issue that frequently occurs. Although few plants have ever been permanently damaged by pruning at the wrong time of year, bad timing can result in disappointment due to lack of flowers and fruits produced by the pruned plant. Before pruning, determine the proper pruning time for the plant you seek to prune.

Many gardeners like to prune in winter because there isn't much else to do. Also, during winter many trees are leafless, making broken or damaged limbs easy to spot. It is important to remember, however, that not all plants benefit from winter pruning. Summer-flowering trees and shrubs such as crape myrtle and rose of Sharon are good choices for late winter pruning. Early flowering trees and shrubs such as azalea, forsythia, and lilac should never be pruned in the winter. This is because the flower buds that will become spring blossoms are already formed; winter pruning will remove these buds, resulting in a lack of spring blooms.

Certain trees such as maple, birch, dogwood, and elm are referred to as bleeders. When pruned during winter, they will drip large amounts of sap. This doesn't harm the tree, but can be unsightly. To avoid heavy bleeding, prune bleeder trees during the summer months.



**Know when and where to cut before you prune.**  
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Good, sharp tools are necessary to make clean, precise cuts. Quality tools are expensive. They pay for themselves, however, by producing clean cuts that heal quickly. Take time to learn how to make proper cuts to cause the least damage to the plants you are pruning.

When unsure about the proper time to prune an unruly tree or shrub, contact your local Cooperative Extension center for advice. Also, recognize that some jobs are too large for a homeowner. When the job is too big, call an experienced, licensed arborist who has the proper tools to get the job done safely and properly.

— Donna Teasley

## Extension Showcase

### 2014 Western NC EMGV Symposium

The 2014 Western North Carolina EMGV Symposium was a huge success. Held October 9, at the DoubleTree hotel and conference center in Asheville, NC, the event was attended by more than 140 people.

Held each year, the goal of the symposium is to provide continuing education for Extension Master Gardener Volunteers and home gardeners in western North Carolina at a reasonable cost.

The theme of the 2014 event was “Maximizing Your Garden, Minimizing Your Work” and featured presentations from area Extension agents and local experts.

Everything from pruning to smart garden planning was covered in the breakout sessions. Area Commercial Horticulture Agent Craig Mauney discussed pairing plants in the garden over lunch, and Bryce Lane was truly entertaining as the keynote speaker!

The 2015 symposium committee is already meeting to plan next year’s event, so keep your eyes and ears open for more information!

—Kerrie Roach

## Smart Gardening — Controlling voles

**M**any folks do not know what voles are, but anyone who has ever experienced the devastation that voles can cause will never forget them. Voles are in the rodent family and look like mice. There are two types of voles: the pine vole, which is about 3 inches long, and the meadow vole, which is about 5 inches long.

Homeowners don’t usually realize they have voles until they see damage in their landscapes and flowerbeds. Voles eat bulbs and roots and can even eat the trunks of small trees. As a result, plants wilt and may feel loose in the ground where the vole has eaten the roots or bulbs. Voles can also girdle trees and are a particular nuisance to fruit growers.

Meadow voles do their damage aboveground and can kill trees by eating the bark all the way around the trunk at ground level. Close inspection will show teeth grooves in the wood. Pine voles do the most damage to home plantings because they attack from underground and are active year-round.



**Pine vole** ©U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The trick to controlling pine voles is to set mousetraps baited with raw apple pieces by vole holes. Cover the trap and hole with a bucket. The trap and hole must be covered because pine voles do not come above ground. The timing is also very important. Trapping is most successful between November and March when plants are dormant and food is scarce.

Tour your landscape and flowerbeds often and watch for unexplained holes and wilted plants. If you suspect that voles are present, start trapping. These varmints are persistent. But if you are a smart gardener, you’ll triumph!

— Donna Teasley

## Food Production — Improving root growth

**D**uring the winter months, several steps can be taken to ensure future yields of fruit and vegetable crops. Improving the soil so plants can develop healthy, vigorous root systems should be at the top of the list. Roots take up water and nutrients from the soil necessary for plant growth. Adequate root development is vital to the garden’s future growth and depends on proper soil preparation.

Improving your soil begins with soil pH. All but three essential elements come from the soil. Their availability is affected by soil pH level.

Soil pH also impacts the amount and activity of soil microorganisms. Through soil testing, we can check soil pH and find what nutrients are currently present. Most vegetables and fruits grow best at a pH of 6.0 – 7.0. If soil pH is too low, apply lime based on the soil test recommendations. Cultivate lime into the soil during the winter months to allow time for it to do its job.

The addition of calcium, by liming also works to improve soil structure and workability. When garden soils are compacted, root growth slows and nutrient uptake likewise suffers. Clay soils often benefit from adding both lime and organic matter.

Applying composted organic matter, such as composted manure or leaf compost, when the garden is fallow will help to build the soil’s organic matter levels. Incorporate compost into the soil to enhance the soil’s water-holding capacity, increase root penetration, and increase ease of tillage. In time, these steps will lead to a more productive garden and can have a dramatic impact on the amount that is harvested.

— Jan McGuinn



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## Pest Alert — Daylily leafminers

The daylily leafminer is a relatively new insect pest to American gardeners. Discovered in the United States in 2006, this pest is now widespread in the Southeast. Like many invasive pests, this insect is native to Asia, which has a climate similar to ours.

Leafminers are small flies that lay eggs inside leaves. Gardeners may be familiar with leafminer species that feed on other plants, such as columbine (*Aquilegia*) and boxwood (*Buxus*). Immature leafminers, known as maggots, damage leaves by tunneling inside their host plant's leaf tissue. Their tunnels, or mines, may be straight or serpentine.

Adult daylily leafminers usually emerge in July and may be seen resting on daylily flowers.

Adults insert eggs into daylily leaves. Maggots

feed in mines inside leaves, causing silver vertical lines on the leaf surface. Repeated feeding from leafminers can disfigure foliage but should not seriously harm plants.

Leafminers are difficult to control. To date, there have not been any formal trials of

insecticides to control daylily leafminers. Because daylily leafminers feed inside leaves, contact insecticides will not control them. In fact, spraying contact insecticides for this pest will kill beneficial insects that help keep leafminer populations low.

Removing leaves that show leafminer damage should slow the spread of this pest. For help diagnosing plant problems, including daylily leafminers, contact your local Extension center.

— Amanda Taylor



**Daylily leafminer damage**  
©Steve Frank, NC State

## Carolina Lawns — Winter browsing

There is little to do for the lawns until February's fertilizer and pre-emergent applications, allowing gardeners to catch up on some rest and relaxation before spring.

Assuming you've long ago taken care of the leaves in your lawn, then kicking back by the fire and watching football might be in your plans. Might I suggest you use this down time to read up on weeds, diseases, and insects that plague the lawn during the growing season? More times than not, we find ourselves in reaction mode when it comes to turf issues. Wouldn't it be nice to know in advance what to watch out for?

Whether you're in the city in a high profile area or in the country in a more secluded setting, maintaining and managing turfgrass can be a daunting task. How much fertilizer do I need? When should I apply lime? How short should my grass be mowed? What's causing the

brown spots in my yard? NC State University's turfgrass department's website, [www.Turffiles.com](http://www.Turffiles.com), can answer these and many other questions.

Filled with research-based information, the Turffiles website will equip you to be the envy of your neighborhood. Not only will you learn how to spot threats to your own lawn, but you may just find yourself prepared to be the speaker at your next neighborhood association meeting.

Take time this winter to educate yourselves on the finer points of lawn management. Go to [www.turffiles.com](http://www.turffiles.com) and browse the tabs. You'll be amazed at the wealth of information available! Pull out that laptop during half-time and prepare yourself for what may be lurking just below your turf. You'll be glad you did come February!

— Julie Flowers

# Tips & Tasks

## Lawns

- Fertilize cool-season lawns in mid-February with 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of lawn area. To determine how many pounds of fertilizer to apply, divide 100 by the first number of the fertilizer analysis.
- Control winter weeds by spraying a broadleaf herbicide on a warm, calm day when temperatures are above 55° F.

## Ornamentals

- Did you forget to plant your spring-flowering bulbs? You can still plant them now; large healthy bulbs may still bloom.
- Prune limbs and branches injured by snow and ice. Be sure to use a sharp pair of pruners or a sharp saw to make a clean cut. Wound paints are unnecessary.
- In late February, prune plants that bloom on new season's growth such as crape myrtle and rose of Sharon; cut back ornamental grasses.

## Miscellaneous

- When using salt to melt ice on walks and driveways, spread it carefully to avoid damage to nearby shrubs. Consider using sand or sawdust instead.
- Bird feeders serve as a supplement to the natural foods in our backyard. If you have feeders, remember you should continue to provide this food source throughout the winter.

— Donna Teasley





©/J Raulston Arboretum

**New from NCSU — ‘Raulston Hardy’ viburnum**

**V***iburnum obovatum* is an evergreen shrub native to the southeastern United States. The cultivar ‘Raulston Hardy’ was selected for its dense, compact habit and cold hardiness to Zone 6. Flat clusters of white flowers bloom in April, as well as sporadically throughout fall and winter. ‘Raulston Hardy’ viburnum grows best in moist acidic soil in full sun, but will tolerate partial shade. Once established in the landscape, it can be quite drought tolerant. In sandy or alkaline soils incorporate organic matter into the soil before planting. The habit of ‘Raulston Hardy’ viburnum is similar to that of dwarf yaupon, making it a great substitute for Japanese holly or dwarf boxwood in foundation plantings. The combination of small size, tidy habit, tough constitution, and four-season appeal make ‘Raulston Hardy’ a great native plant for the landscape. — Shawn Banks

Helping You Grow

**The General Store**

Having trouble finding agricultural products or services? Visit The General Store, a new website from the NC Department of Agriculture. The purpose of The General Store is to bring all NC agricultural businesses together in one place. This site can help you find sources of local honey, gardening supplies, equipment, produce, meats, agritourism, and much more.

Visit <http://www.ncagr.gov/NCproducts/> to check out all the local items that can be purchased in North Carolina. This site is user friendly, easy to navigate, and even allows you to narrow your search to a specific county or product category.

— Amie Newsome

**Edibles — Pawpaw**

**T**hough native to the eastern United States, the pawpaw is not widely cultivated. Pawpaw trees have large leaves, giving them a tropical appearance. They can be found growing wild near creek banks and in river bottoms. Pawpaws grow best in slightly acid (pH 5.5 – 7.0), deep, fertile, well-drained soils and are rarely bothered by deer. Keep plants well watered and partially shaded the first year or two. Fruit production begins after five to seven years. When planting pawpaws, two genetically different trees are needed to ensure cross-pollination. Pawpaws can fruit in the shade but perform best in full sun and with some wind protection. Their ripe fruits are soft, thin-skinned, and have a banana-mango flavor. Fruits ripen from late August to early October depending upon the variety and are eaten fresh.

— Karen Neill

**Sustainability — Composting with worms**

**C**omposting with earthworms, or vermicomposting, is an excellent way to turn food scraps into nutrient-dense fertilizer that can boost plant health and increase flower and fruit production. Vermicomposting is similar to the conventional method of composting, but it requires less space and can be done indoors. And of course, you get to tell your friends and family that you have worms.

Red wigglers are the typical species used in vermicomposting and can be purchased online by the pound. To get started,

you will need bedding, food scraps, and a bin for the worms to live in. The size of the bin depends on the amount of food scraps your household generates. A plastic box that is 2 to 3 feet wide and 12 inches deep is good for most families. Drill several small holes in the bottom of the bin, and place a second box underneath to capture any liquid that seeps out.

Add 6 inches of damp shredded newspaper bedding, a handful of garden soil, and a pound of worms to the bin. After one week, add a 1-inch layer of food scraps

and cover with another 1-inch layer of dampened shredded newspaper. Store the bin out of direct sunlight and where it will not freeze.

Avoid feeding your worms meat, greasy or oily foods, onions, garlic, bones, and acidic foods such as citrus peels. Before adding waste to your bin, chop food scraps into smaller pieces to make them easily digestible. Bury scraps in the bedding to prevent odor. Learn more here: <http://www.bae.ncsu.edu/topic/vermicomposting/>

— Sam Marshall

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**Extension Gardener** provides timely, research-based horticultural information. We publish four issues per year. Send comments about **Extension Gardener** to:

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CALS COMMUNICATIONS — 2015-033

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