

The Carolina Sandhills Gardener

December 2022 – February 2023

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Pruning Workshops

Are you interested in growing better blueberries or muscadines? We have two upcoming workshops to will help you with that!

Join us **Saturday, February 4 at 10:00 a.m.** at the O.P. Owens Agriculture Center, 455 Caton Road in Lumberton, for our **Muscadine workshop**. After the class presentation, we will travel to a nearby vineyard for hands-on pruning training. Please register at the following link:

<https://go.ncsu.edu/muscadinecultureandpruningworkshop>

Learn to grow **Better Blueberries** at a hands-on workshop with Extension Specialist Dr. Bill Cline on **Friday, February 10, from 1:30 – 3:30 p.m.** at a blueberry field located at 2173 NC Highway 130 W, Rowland. To register use the following link: <https://go.ncsu.edu/betterblueberries1012023>

Find more info on both at <https://robeson.ces.ncsu.edu/>

Your Table, Your Food Vegetable Gardening Series

Hold the following dates for an upcoming series on vegetable gardening:

Starting Vegetable Seed	February 16, 6-8 p.m.
Sustainable Vegetable Gardening	March 16, 6-8 p.m.
Seed Saving	April 20 - 6-8 p.m.
Composting/Vermicomposting	May 18th 6-8 p.m.

More details and registration info will be available in the coming weeks at <https://robeson.ces.ncsu.edu/>.

Take Advantage of Soil Testing

Soil testing is a service provided by the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) at their Agronomic Division in Raleigh that will assess the present levels of major plant nutrients, soil pH, and micronutrients. You can pick up free kits at your local Extension Center. Soil samples are currently \$4 per sample through the end of March. For more info, visit <https://www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/>.

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If you are interested in learning more about any information in this newsletter, contact the Extension Center at 910-671-3276 or visit our website at robeson.ces.ncsu.edu. For accommodations for persons with disabilities, contact Cooperative Extension no later than ten (10) business days before the event.



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Lawn and Turfgrass Management

By: Jacob Barber

Extension Horticulture Agent, N.C. Cooperative Extension, Bladen County Center

For the next few months there are a few things you can do to improve and sustain the health of your lawn. For cool season yards, fertilizer can be applied all the way through February. The rate and type of fertilizer would depend on the annual soil sample test that you take in your yard. Also, remember to always read your label for any fertilizer that is recommended by the NCDA for any rate or modes of application as well as the PPE (personal protective equipment). If you are looking to reestablish a lawn (cool or warm season), it is best to sod this time of the year.



Large Patch Disease <https://pamlico.ces.ncsu.edu/2020/12/winter-lawn-care/>

Weed management at this time would involve mostly controlling the winter annuals. Post-emergent control will do best for winter annual grass weeds until around April. Post-emergent control for winter annual broadleaf weeds can be applied until March. Depending on the weed species, you can start applying pre-emergent pesticides around the end of January to control the summer annual grass weeds. The summer annual broadleaf weeds can be controlled by a pre-emergent pesticide application in February.

As far as disease management, continue to keep an eye out for gray leaf spot in your yard and Pythium root rot. You may want to begin keeping eye an for large patch in your warm season lawn once temperature begin to rise for the spring in February. There is nothing that should be of concern with insect management at this time.

If you notice bare spots in your lawn or areas of poor growth, now is the perfect time to figure out why it has occurred. Remember grass needs sunlight, proper drainage, and healthy fertility. Taking a soil sample is a great idea if you have not already done so. You should not be replanting anything right now. Instead you should wait until the spring. Warm-season grasses can be planted once temperatures increase in April through July.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your local Extension office!

Plant Spotlight: *Camellia*, 'Snow Flurry'

By: Jacob Barber

Extension Horticulture Agent, N.C. Cooperative Extension, Bladen County Center

Our plant spotlight for this issue is the *Camellia* cultivar 'Snow Flurry.' This evergreen shrub is bred for its premium cold-hardiness and astounding white flowers. This plant in the landscape will give you beautiful winter color, and it even grows well in containers. It is a great specimen for cut flowers. According to the NCEG (North Carolina Extension Gardener) Plant Toolbox, 'Snow Flurry' is part of the Winter Series camellias. Specifically, it is an Ackerman hybrid cross between the *Camellia* 'Frost Princess' hybrid (flower form) and *Camellia oleifera* 'Plain Jain' (cold hardiness). 'Snow Flurry' is the earliest of the fall blooming winter series of camellias.

Similar to other *Camellias*, it requires consistently moist, well-drained, acidic soil with a high organic matter. When deciding where to place the camellia in your landscape, be sure to give it some shelter to protect the flower and leaf buds from cold winter winds. It is a partial shade plant that only needs direct sunlight for only part of the day, 2-6 hours. The shrub will get to about 5-7 feet high and 3-5 feet wide. This will depend on how well you prune the shrub.



Flower - Nov. 11 - Warren Co., NC - Cathy DeWitt



Camellia 'Snow flurry' - Leaf and Flower By Noramunro

Camellias are susceptible to viruses and some fungal disease, such as dieback, cankers, flower blight, and root rot. Be sure to watch for scales, aphids, plant-hoppers, and spider mites. They are especially problematic on stressed plants. Proper care, including soil sample, fertilizer, lime, and pruning management should keep this shrub in a great and healthy condition.

For additional information please visit the NC Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox at:
<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/camellia-snow-flurry/>.

Edible Corner: Cool Season Vegetables

By: Mack Johnson

Extension Horticulture Agent, N.C. Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center

Though not a lot is growing in the vegetable garden during the dead of winter, it doesn't mean there is nothing edible we can grow. Have you tried micro-greens or sprouts for windowsill gardening? These small plants are great tasting, highly nutritional, and you are still eating fresh, local greens you have grown. It's easy enough to start a small tray of either micro-greens or sprouts in your home in the sunniest window you have for some natural light. These crops just barely germinate, or only grow a few days past germination, so it's not a long process. They only need a few inches of soil or substrate, with the seed planted just one-eighth of an inch or so; keep the substrate moist but not soggy. Harvest with scissors and enjoy the fruits of your winter labor. You may plant a new crop, or use multiple trays for a continuous supply.

Cool-season vegetables such as carrots, garden peas, radishes, Irish potatoes, turnips, lettuce, and spinach can be directly seeded into the garden in the late winter for the harvest in spring. Cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower transplants can also be planted late winter as well.

A solution to start gardening earlier than usual is to build a cold frame. This easy-to-make structure offers about 5-degree Fahrenheit of overnight cold protection and allows the soil to warm up much earlier for seed starting. A simple cold frame can be made using 10-foot lengths of half-inch PVC pipe, large clips (such as binder clips or clothespins), some string, and a 10-foot-wide sheet of plastic.



<https://www.farmtek.com/wcsstore/EngineeringServices/allbizunits/prodimages/large/105148b.jpg>

Over a 4-foot-wide bed, push one end of a PVC pipe into the ground 6-to-8-inches deep, bend it over the bed, and push it into the soil to about the same depth on the other side. Repeat this step about every 2 feet for the length of the bed, forming 'ribs' over the bed. For an 8-foot-long bed, you will need five ribs. A 'spine' tied to each rib in the center of the bend will prevent the ribs from moving around when the plastic is draped over the frame. The spine can be another piece of half-inch PVC pipe cut to the length of the bed. Use string to tie the spine under the ribs so it will not rub against the plastic cover. The ribs should stand about 4 feet high in the center of the bed. Assuming an 8-foot-long bed, cut the plastic 16-feet-long ($8+4+4=16$) and 10-feet-wide. Drape the plastic over the frame. Pull the sides together on each end using the clips to secure the plastic around the bed. Open the ends on warm days so the garden doesn't get too hot inside.

Seasonal Tips and Tasks: Winter Chores in the Garden

By: Mack Johnson

Extension Horticulture Agent, N.C. Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center

Winter in the Coastal Plain gives gardeners a moment to take a breath and catch up. These winter chores will put you ahead of the game come spring:

- Clean up your garden and landscape. Good sanitation is the first defense against garden diseases since many pathogens can overwinter in debris left in the garden and will readily infect the new season's plants.
- Clean your tools and wipe with an oily rag to help preserve them.
- Sharpen your lawn mower's blade and any other tools with blades, such as pruners.
- Turn off the irrigation on your turf. Drain and wrap any above ground plumbing fixtures to protect from freezing.
- Test your soil; supplies are available from your County Extension Center, but remember we are now in the Soil Lab's peak season and samples will be \$4 per sample.
- Properly store left-over horticultural chemicals in a location that will not freeze. Make sure nothing is left out for pets or children to get into.
- Service all small engines so they will start next spring.
- Don't fertilize your plants now— wait until spring.
- Start a garden log to keep track of pests and plants of interest in your landscape. It is also a good idea to keep a schematic drawing of your garden each year, so you can rotate crops effectively.
- Prune most trees and shrubs during their dormant period – remember disease, damage, and direction are the main reasons to prune.
- Many fruit trees, and definitely grape vines, benefit from pruning each year. If you can wait until later winter to prune, this will aid the plant in surviving our winter temperatures. Check your local Extension website's Events page for any pruning workshops being offered in the area.
- Don't forget our feathered friends also trying to survive our winter months. Suet and bird feeders will help carry them through the bleak landscape. They also need access to fresh water, too.



<https://wildbirdstore.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/SelectingSeedsandFeedersHero.png>

Pest Alert: Bagworms

By: Robby Brockman

Extension Area Horticulture Agent, N.C. Cooperative Extension, Hoke & Scotland Counties



Eastern Tent Caterpillar, David L. Clement,
University of Maryland, Bugwood.org

There are many insects which we call bagworms. Most of these insects are species of caterpillars which form protective bags, or tents, around themselves with silk. In the spring, we have the eastern tent caterpillar (*Malacosoma americanum*) which forms nests under the protection of silk in the crotches of trees. They prefer our native black cherry (*Prunus serotina*) and its relatives, but can be found on many trees. A second species which is often referred to as bagworms is the fall webworm (*Hyphantria cunea*). The fall webworm has a small and unapparent generation in early summer before developing a large generation in the early fall. Fall webworms tend to form their large silk nests at the end of the branches of many species of trees. Two of their favorite tree species are pecan (*Carya illinoensis*) and American persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*). The last insect to frequently be called bagworms is the common bagworm (*Psychidae* spp.) which tend to be much less apparent than eastern tent caterpillars and fall webworms.

Bagworms are common throughout the landscape but often go unnoticed because of their camouflage. Rather than forming colonies, bagworms spin individual silk bags to protect themselves. They then attach leaves, small twigs and bark, and even small seeds or fruits to the silk to blend into their surroundings. As they are attaching plant material from their host plant, bagworms' bags often have very different appearances. These camouflaged bags are particularly effective when the bagworm is on an evergreen conifer as the bags look similar to an immature evergreen cone. Evergreen conifers are also where bagworms cause the most damage. A combination of protection from predators, camouflage, and evergreen's susceptibility to defoliation means that bagworms can easily kill trees.



Fall Webworm, Eric Rebek, FMC, Bugwood.org



Bagworm, Eric Rebek, FMC, Bugwood.org

Just like eastern tent caterpillars and fall webworms, a bagworm's armor protects it from foliar insecticide sprays. This often leaves manual removal as the best method of control. Bagworms have only one generation and can be manually removed at any time of the year. However, it is particularly important to remove bagworms before spring. While male bagworms will pupate and fly as a moth, female bagworms never leave their bag. After mating, female bagworms migrate up the tree before laying their eggs within the bag and dying. The female's old bag hangs at the top of the tree, where newly hatched bagworms can emerge in the spring and use silk strands to parachute throughout your yard. If you see bagworms on your plant, don't get the sprayer and don't get the torch. Instead, go get a pair of scissors or pruners to remove individual bagworms and twigs encircled with silk.

Sustainability Feature: Xeric Gardening

By: Robby Brockman

Extension Area Horticulture Agent, N.C. Cooperative Extension, Hoke & Scotland Counties

Xeric, or dry, habitats are found throughout the world, including are very own Sandhills region. These habitats may have moderate rainfall, but conditions such as landscape position and soil type cause them to lose water quickly. A xeric garden is a dry garden whose goal is to use the water which naturally enters the garden without needing supplemental water. Because of this, xeric gardens tend to be both low maintenance and highly sustainable.



Photo by Kathy Sill, NC Extension gardener Plant Toolbox

While xeric gardens should eventually be low maintenance, they need proper planning and preparation to be effective. Areas of a xeric garden should be split up based on the level of water they will receive as not all portions of the garden will have the same interception. Plants can be grouped based on water needs and added to areas of the garden which get very little, little, or moderate water from the surrounding landscape. Before planting, make sure that the soil is prepared for your plants. A soil sample can be sent to the North Carolina Department of Agriculture for nutrient and pH analysis. If the soil is compacted, it will need to be broken up using tillage or hand tools and amended with compost. Plants should be mulched to further hold moisture in the garden. Organic mulches, such as pine straw, wood chips, or shredded

leaves, will break down over time and should be supplemented annually. Establishing plants will likely require some irrigation the first year after planting but will become drought tolerant once established.

Xeric gardens can incorporate many of our native plants which may be on the decline due to habitat loss or conversion. A few native species to include in a xeric garden include American agave (*Agave virginica*), whorled milkweed (*Asclepias quadrifolia*), butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), lance-leaf blanket flower (*Gaillardia aestivalis*), prickly pear cacti (*Opuntia spp.*), and Spanish bayonet (*Yucca filamentosa*). In addition to these native plants, there are many species from other areas that are suitable for xeric gardens.