

# The Carolina Sandhills Gardener

March–May 2023

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION

### Seed Saving Workshop

Have you ever had a favorite fruit or vegetable and wanted to save its seed? Come join us on at the O.P. Owens Agriculture Center, located at 455 Caton Road in Lumberton on April 20 from 6-8 p.m. and find out if it is a variety you can save!

Discover the difference between open pollinated and heirloom varieties. Are some seeds harvested dry and some harvested wet. What is the process? How do you store your saved seed? Bring your questions and discover how you can save your seed too!

Register by April 19 at 5:00 p.m. by visiting the following link:

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

Please leave a working phone number with registration in case of rescheduling.

### Your Table, Your Food Series

Hold the following dates for upcoming classes in this series:


Beekeeping Awareness	April 4, 6-8 p.m.
Seed Saving	April 20, 6-8 p.m.
Poultry Processing	May 12, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.
Composting/Vermicomposting	May 18, 6-8 p.m.

More details and registration info will be available in the coming weeks at <https://robeson.ces.ncsu.edu/>, via email, and by mail. Make sure your contact info is updated by calling the office.

### 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/>.

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](https://robeson.ces.ncsu.edu). For accommodations for persons with disabilities, contact Cooperative Extension no later than ten (10) business days before the event.



Mack Johnson  
 Extension Agent  
 Agriculture – Horticulture  
 Email: [Mack\\_Johnson@ncsu.edu](mailto:Mack_Johnson@ncsu.edu)

### Inside This Issue

Important Information.....1

Turfgrass: Lawn and Turfgrass Management .....2

Plant Spotlight: *Columbine* ‘Aquilegia canadensis’ .....3

Starting Your Seeds.....4

Seasonal Tips and Tasks: Spring .....5

Robeson County Center  
 O. P. Owens Agriculture Center  
 P. O. Box 2280  
 455 Caton Road  
 Lumberton, NC 28359

Phone - 910-671-3276  
 Fax - 910-671-6278  
 Website - [robeson.ces.ncsu.edu](https://robeson.ces.ncsu.edu)

NC State University and N.C. A&T State University are collectively committed to positive action to secure equal opportunity and prohibit discrimination and harassment regardless of age, color, disability, family and marital status, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, political beliefs, race, religion, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, and veteran status. NC State, N.C. A&T, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments cooperating.

## Lawn and Turfgrass Management

By: Jacob Barber, Horticulture Agent, N.C. Cooperative Extension, Bladen County Center

As people are savoring time spent outdoors, many are getting out and enjoying their yards. When thinking about managing your lawn, it is always best to start with your goals in mind. Whether you want your lawn to be the envy of the neighborhood or you want to enhance the appearance of the grass species currently present in your lawn, we've got some lawn care tips for you.

**Mowing Tips:** Keep the mower blades sharp and balanced. The cleanest cut and best mowing are obtained when the mower blades are sharp. Dull mower blades reduce lawn quality by tearing instead of cleanly cutting the grass. Tearing creates many ragged leaf ends that quickly wither and bleach and are easy ports of entry for disease. Using a sharp mower is especially important for difficult-to-mow grasses, such as zoysiagrass, bahiagrass, and certain types of perennial ryegrass cultivars. A properly sharpened and balanced mower blade will also reduce mower vibration, lengthen mower life, and reduce fuel consumption by as much as 22 percent.

Mow at the proper height. The frequency of mowing is governed by the desired grass height and by the amount of growth, which depends on temperature, fertility, moisture conditions, season, and the natural growth rate of the grass. In most instances, this may amount to biweekly and weekly mowing. To maintain a high-quality lawn, turfgrass should be cut often enough that less than one-third of the leaf surface is removed with each mowing. If the lawn gets too high during wet seasons, raise the mower and cut off a fourth to a half of the present growth. Then lower the mower to its proper height and mow again in a day or two.



**Irrigation Tips:** Water in the early morning if possible. This is the preferred time to water because it reduces the risk of disease, water loss through evaporation, and improper water distribution. Also, the demand for water by industry and municipalities is usually low at this time. Water established lawns to a soil depth of 6 to 8 inches to encourage deep rooting. Usually, 1 inch of water per week is adequate. Ideally, this would not be applied in one application. Applying 0.5 inch of water every three to four days is adequate for most situations. Use cans or a rain gauge to determine how much water is being delivered in a certain period of time. It takes 640 gallons of water to apply 1 inch of water per 1,000 sq. ft. Because clay soils accept water slowly, water should be measured to prevent wasteful runoff. Water clay soils until runoff is about to occur. Wait 30 minutes for the water to be absorbed, then apply more water until the desired depth or amount is achieved. This same technique can be used on slopes and compacted soils. Few lawns established on clay soils can absorb more than 0.5 inch of water per hour. Sandy soils require more frequent watering. Applying 0.5 inch of water every third day is usually sufficient. Adjust any automatic irrigation system to supplement rainfall so that the lawn is not over-watered.

---

---

## **Plant Spotlight: Columbine 'Aquilegia canadensis'**

By: Jacob Barber, Horticulture Agent, N.C. Cooperative Extension, Bladen County Center

The Easter columbine is a native herbaceous perennial in the buttercup family. They are a pollinator friendly plant that attract hummingbirds, butterflies, and bumblebees. After the flower is gone the plants acts a great ground cover with a rich green color.

Columbine is the common name from the Latin Columbia but the scientific genus name is Aquilegia from the Latin word for eagle. There are approximately 300 species of this perennial with five-petaled flowers that have long, backward extending spurs. They come in many colors. Their height will depend upon several factors but on average they reach around two feet in height and bloom in late spring and early summer. Columbines grow well in zones 3-9. Partial shade is recommended.

Few problems and is drought resistant since they often live on rocky ledges in the wild. Because Columbine has colorful flowers, it gives your yard a lot of interest in spring. The flowers nod their heads down, and their centers take on a honeycomb look. Best of all, these are easy to grow plants and if you don't deadhead them, you will soon have plenty of replacements. It is proficient in self seeding.



You can use this plant in several different landscape designs as well as woodland habitats, naturalized areas, shady garden borders, native gardens or pollinator gardens. There are several different cultivars/ varieties you can choose depending on what color you would like to see in your landscape. 'Corbett' is a dwarf with yellow flowers. 'Little Lanterns' get to around 10 inches tall with red and yellow blooms. 'Nana' have yellow flowers.

For more information about this flower and many more follow this link:

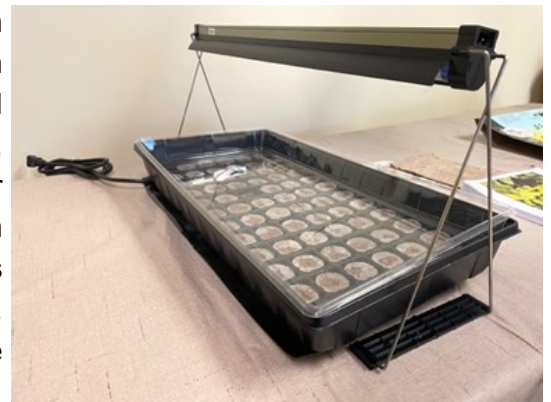
<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/aquilegia-canadensis/>

## **Starting Your Seeds**

By: Mack Johnson, Horticulture Agent, N.C. Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center

As I am getting my thoughts together for this article, it is currently sunny and 75 degrees outside, and forecasted to be unseasonably warm the next four days. Itching to start gardening outdoors, I absolutely know it is NOT spring yet. I often joke about how many false springs we have in North Carolina before we have an actual real spring. Traditionally the last frost date for our area is April 15, so no matter how much warm weather we have before then, I do not intend on putting anything out that will need a lot of frost protection before that date. With that said, it is a great time to start our seeds indoors. We have scanned and studied our seed catalogs, we have selected our tried-and-true varieties, but hopefully you have selected some seeds that will be new to you. Seeds germinated by mid-March should be a decent size seedling to transplant after April 15.

Starting your own seeds offer several advantages. You can grow a reliable “tried-and-true” variety or a brand new selection that may not be sold locally as a plant yet. With some thoughtful planning you are able to have transplants when you need them, and as often as you need them. You can have healthier transplants. It actually takes very little space to start your own seeds. An average-sized seed flat holds 72 cells, which translates to 72 plants – plenty enough for a personal garden or landscape. The choice for containers are almost limitless as long as there are holes in the bottom to allow for drainage.



Seeds need at least three important factors to germinate, and one may surprise you. A seed needs moisture, a temperature within a required range that allows germination, and oxygen or air. Seed will not germinate successfully in a water-soaked environment. This is where a media substrate that allows for uniform moisture and air is so important. A professional germinating mix consists of a very fine textured substrate, allowing for excellent drainage that will hold moisture, yet provide the needed oxygen. It doesn't have to be an organic media, but it does need to be sterile. Temperature can be provided by starting the seeds indoors, and adding a heating mat placed under the tray will boost germination. Keep the soil evenly moist, like a damp wrung out sponge, but not dripping wet. Watering the tray from the bottom will help prevent “damping off”, a fungal disease that will kill small seedlings. So how do you water from the bottom, you ask. It's easy if you are using a multi-cell tray, you leave one cell empty and water straight to the bottom of the tray, allowing natural wicking to pull the water up the substrate column. Allowing water to stand in the bottom of the tray will encourage root rot, so excess water should be poured out. Another option for watering from above would be to use a small spray bottle to gently mist the soil surface without disturbing the tender roots.

Once seeds germinate light, will become a critical factor; low light means spindly or leggy plants, which cannot be corrected. An artificial light source might be needed at this point. Many artificial light manufacturers recommend 16 hours on and 8 hours off. Also important is the need to harden off your seedlings before you transplant to an outdoor environment. So far, your seedlings have been nurtured in a near perfect environment. Two weeks before your transplant date, you should gradually expose your plants to outdoors, first in shade, then increasing their time in sunlight incrementally. During this period it is also recommended to decrease frequency of watering, but not to the point of the plant wilting. This will help acclimate your seedlings to their new, soon-to-be living environment and increase the survival rate.

## **Seasonal Tips and Tasks: Spring 2023**

By: Mack Johnson, Horticulture Agent, N.C. Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center

- Amend your vegetable garden, containers, and raised beds with compost before planting.
- It's not too late to address your soil pH by amending or top dressing with dolomitic lime.
- Set out cabbage, kale, bok choy, and broccoli transplants in the garden early March.
- Continue to sow radishes and lettuce for multiple harvests.
- Start cucumbers, squash, zucchini, and tomatoes for mid-April transplanting outdoors.
- Start other vegetable seed varieties you would like to try for transplanting outdoors after danger of frost has passed.
- Sow parsley, cilantro, and dill direct seeded outdoors.
- Plants sold in retail stores may not always represent what will perform best in your home environment.
- Before planting any fruit trees and shrubs, check your local Extension publications to see what grows best in our area at <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/north-carolina-production-guide-for-smaller-orchard-plantings>
- Perennials such as hostas, daylilies, and phlox can be divided as soon as new growth emerges.
- Most fruit plants can be fertilized in early March to mid-April, but a soil report will give your specific recommendations.
- Houseplants may soon show signs of growth, and now is a good time to check for aphids and mealybugs. Complete spray coverage with insecticidal soap helps control them.
- Last chance to sharpen your tools and pruners before going into spring.
- Finish pruning out dead, diseased, and damaged wood from your shrubs and trees.
- Rejuvenate overgrown broadleaf, evergreen, and deciduous shrubs by heading back to 1 to 2 feet above ground level. Cutting main stems at various heights will result in a more natural appearing shrub. Conifers will not survive this severe pruning.
- For your lawns, apply pre-emergent herbicides as soon as possible; mid-February is the more appropriate time.
- Do NOT fertilize your lawns in March. Do NOT apply Weed-N-Feed to your grass in March. This product contains fertilizer AND a pre-emergent, but the fertilizer is not needed at this time.
- Fertilize bermudagrass and zoysia in April, fertilize centipede and St. Augustine in May. Visit NCSU Turf Files at <https://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/> to access maintenance calendars for NC's most popular grass types or call your local Extension office to obtain a copy.
- Bermuda, zoysia, and centipede lawns can be seeded mid-March through June.
- Mow and bag flowering weeds to help reduce next year's seed population.
- Spraying your lawn for broadleaf weeds can be helpful, but please take caution: the worst time to spray your lawn is when the turf is in the process of greening up. Spray more effectively during dormancy or after full green up.
- Expect dead spots in your turf this spring, commonly referred to as "Winter Kill". This is a symptom of the drastic cold weekend we had in December. Keeping your soil as healthy as possible will gradually fill in the dead spots.
- Newly acquired container plants must be planted at the same depth in the garden; water until established. A 3-inch layer of mulch conserves water, insulates the root zone, and reduces mechanical damage to the young tender plant.
- It's never too late for a soil sample; peak season and the \$4 charge per sample ends April 1, 2023.

For more information, contact Mack Johnson, Extension Horticultural Agent, at 910-671-3276, by email at [Mack\\_Johnson@ncsu.edu](mailto:Mack_Johnson@ncsu.edu), or visit our website at <http://robeson.ces.ncsu.edu/>.

Robeson County Center

# Seed Saving

Have you ever had a favorite fruit or vegetable and wanted to save its seed? Come and find out if it is a variety you can save! Discover the difference between open pollinated and heirloom varieties. Are some seeds harvested dry and some harvested wet? What is the process? How do you store your saved seed? Bring your questions and discover how you can save your seed too!

Please register by **Wednesday, April 19** using the following link:  
<https://go.ncsu.edu/seedsaving>

For more information or to register, contact Mack Johnson, Extension Horticultural Agent, at 910-671-3276 or by email at [mack\\_johnson@ncsu.edu](mailto:mack_johnson@ncsu.edu).



**Thursday, April 20, 2023**  
**6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.**

**O. P. Owens Agriculture Center**  
**455 Caton Road, Lumberton**

*Accommodation requests related to a disability or limited English proficiency should be made by April 9, 2023, to Mack Johnson by calling 910-671-3276.*

856 copies of this public document were printed at a cost of \$0.57 per copy

# YOUR TABLE YOUR FOOD



# Upcoming

## Events Spring 2023

April  
**04**

### ***Beekeeping Awareness***

Information on the importance of honeybees to our nation's food supply and how to become a beekeeper.

April  
**20**

### ***Seed Saving Workshop***

Find out how to store and save seeds for your favorite fruits and vegetables, the different processes for harvesting seed, and what varieties work best!

May  
**12**

### ***Poultry Processing Day***

Learn how to process your own poultry in this two-part event. Class session in the morning and hands-on processing in the afternoon. \$25 registration fee; lunch is provided.

May  
**18**

### ***Composting & Vermicomposting***

Backyard gardeners can learn the ABC's of composting and vermiculture - the practice of using earthworms for composting

***Find all upcoming events and registration information at <https://robesson.ces.ncsu.edu/>***