# **THE CAROLINA SANDHILLS GARDENER**

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### **IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

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## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

SEED SAVING: JANUARY 20, 2024 10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.

PRUNING ORNAMENTALS JANUARY 27, 2024 10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.

# 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. For more info, visit <u>https://www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/</u>

If you are interested in learning more about any information in this newsletter, contact the Extension Center at 910-671-32-76 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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Extension Agent Agriculture - Horticulture Email: Mack Johnson@ncsu.edu

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# LAWNS AND TURFGRASS: FALL MANAGEMENT IN LAWNS



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

One might think in the winter there is not a whole lot to be done in your yard as far as management. Depending on the temperatures, some might not even want to be outside. However, this time of the year it is very important to focus on sanitation of your yard. Now, this doesn't mean grab your disinfectant. It simply means protecting your landscape from any overwintering pests or diseases and making sure your lawn is prepared for a healthy green-up in the spring.



**JACOB BARBER** 

Removing lawn debris such as rocks, sticks, and leaves will ensure protection against these overwintering pests. For warm-season grasses, when removing debris, do not mow the grass. Raking leaves and debris will be sufficient enough.

Some diseases to look out for as we are transitioning into these colder temperatures are large patch, brown patch, leaf spot, and fairy ring. Large patch is a common disease which you might see earlier in the year once temperature reach below 70 degrees Fahrenheit.

#### Large Patch

It can occur in cool and wet conditions. Not only can you see it entering winter, you might also see it once temperatures rise and we are heading into the spring for green-up. Refrain from fertilizing this time of year. This could affect the time of green-up and could make your lawn more susceptible to spring dead spot.

Sanitation management includes the removal of weeds in your landscape. Some are easier to remove by hand than others. Certain weeds, such as chickweed and henbit, can be controlled by applying broadleaf herbicides as necessary. Weeds are the perfect structure for over-wintering insects, so it is also crucial for you to remove weeds from flower beds. As it nears the end of winter and beginning of spring-late February, apply pre-emergent herbicides to control your summer annual's weeds.

If you took a soil sample this past year, great! This is a great time to apply lime to increase your pH. If you increase your pH, there is a potential to increase the availability of the nutrients in the soil to be absorbed by the turf. Having a healthy lawn is the key to preventing pests and diseases from affecting your yard.

If you would like more information about lawn and turf management, please contact your local Cooperative Extension office or follow this link to NC State Extension Lawn maintenance calendar: <u>https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/catalog/series/227/</u>.



# PLANT SPOTLIGHT: CAMELLIA, 'CAMELLIA JAPONICA'

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





Leaves and flower; Scott Ackerman

This winter there will be a lot of flowers in bloom. However one of the prettiest flowers you might see is the Camellia. The common Camellia's scientific name is Camellia japonica. It belongs in the family of Theaceae (tea). Depending on how you prune it or the variety, it can be considered as a woody shrub or a small tree. It is not native to North Carolina. Its origin is China, parts of Japan, and Korea. However, here in this area it has become a southern favorite in the landscape.

As you plan to include this beautiful plant into your landscape, remember it prefers shade to part-shade. It is a winter-flowering plant, but it still needs a little protection from the dry, cold winds. Its soil should be well-drained with an acidic pH; preferably around 5.5 to 6.5. These are quite long-lived plants that are slow to grow. When installing this plant into your landscape, be sure to dig a large hole that is three times wider than the root ball. Not deeper! This practice will reduce the competition for water and nutrients from surrounding plants.

Camellia has a beautiful range of blooming colors, from all shades of red and pink to an elegant white. With sizes ranging from 2 to 5 inches, depending on the variety, it has the potential to bloom as early as October and finish up around the middle of March. However, excessive sun, cold, or shade can reduce flowering. Over or under watering can cause flower buds to drop. Camellias are a great pollinator attractor and fit well in a pollinator garden or an edible garden.

With non-native plants, problems come with it. Scale, aphids, planthoppers, and spider mites are the most common pests that can affect your Camellia. They are also susceptible to fungal diseases including black mold, anthracnose, petal blight, root rot, canker, leaf spots, and viruses. There are fungicides and insecticides you can find locally that can control most of theses pests. Another way to combat these pests is by getting resistant varieties. However, all varieties of Camellia are susceptible to petal blight fungus. This can be controlled by removing infected plant parts immediately. Symptoms include browning that runs from edges to the center on leaves and/or petals.

Some pruning tips would include removing dead, diseased, or damaged wood; any branches that are unproductive; and any disproportionately long shoots. Aim to prune immediately after flowering or in early summer. If you prune later in the year, it could affect the amount of blooms you have the next season.

Camellia - Flowers - March 17 -Wake County - Cathy Dewitt



# THE QUEEN OF THE GREENS MACK JOHNSON



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

I have found there are a few things in life that illicit a love/hate relationship. You either love it or you hate it. My experience has shown me people in general either love or hate the queen of greens – kale. Personally, I love kale and can eat it straight out of the garden, steamed, sauteed, in a salad, and even baked to make kale chips, one of my favorites. Kale has earned the title of queen because it is one of our superfoods, especially in winter. When many of our favorite veggies are out of season, here comes our nutrient-dense winter green to the rescue, fueling our diet with vitamins, minerals, and 200 percent of our daily requirement of Vitamin C.

Kale is a leafy-green, cool-season annual that can be grown in spring and fall in our area. Plant four weeks before the last expected frost date for a summer harvest and six weeks before your first frost date for a winter harvest. Kale can grow in full sun, but like other winter greens will also perform in partial shade

After selecting a location, amend the soil with 1-2 inches of compost mixed in the top 4-6 inches. Sow seeds onehalf inch deep and an inch apart or transplant seedlings 6 inches apart in rows that are 3 feet apart. Thin the seedlings to 1 foot apart. Mulch the area with 3 inches of organic material such as straw to control weeds, insulate the ground, and conserve moisture.

Kale performs best in well-drained, fertile soils, high in organic matter that has a pH of 6.0 to 7.5. Kale prefers consistent moisture. Kale can tolerate dry spells but the quality and flavor will suffer. Kale also needs nitrogen for good color and tenderness. Providing the correct culture for continuous growth yields the best quality.

Most varieties can yield mature leaves 50 to 75 days after planting. Pick tender baby leaves 20 to 30 days after seeding. Some recommended varieties for our area include: Improved Dwarf Siberian (50 days maturity) with dark green frilly leaves and very cold tolerant, Red Russian (50 days maturity) with purple stems and purple-veined flat leaves, Redbor hybrid (55 Days maturity) with very attractive frilly burgundy leaves that darken in colder weather.

Caterpillars are a major pest of kale and can be controlled by organic means such as Bt, Bacillus thurin-giensis kurstaki, a natural occurring bacterium found in soil.

For more information visit the following website: <u>https://gardening.ces.ncsu.edu/gardening-plants/vegetables</u> Adapted from: <u>https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/kale</u>

https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/media/images/bigstock-Kale-And-Cabbage-Plants-66770539.jpg\_





# SEASONAL TIPS AND TASKS: <<< 5 WINTER 2023-2024 GARDEN JOURNALING MACK JOHNSON

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

My memory is not what it used to be; matter of fact, if I don't write it down, I may not remember it at all. In saying that, a good practice to help gardeners succeed is journaling. Yes, what many do in their daily life also works great for gardening. I have met many successful gardeners that depend on journaling to garden. Journaling will be even more helpful, especially now with more variable weather patterns. It may be easy to remember the big failures, but noting the small ones will increase our gardening success. This winter is the perfect time to note the past year's ups and downs. Which plant variety thrived in that hot sunny spot and which one didn't? Were there any disease issues that could have been prevented or reduced if I had been scouting properly? These answers will be helpful next year and the years beyond.

So what else should we include in our journal? A general schematic or line drawing map of your gardening area is essential for planning any crop rotations, aiding not only this upcoming season, but the next two seasons as well. Recording any soil test reports and any fertilizers applied, along with the date applied, will greatly help reduce a common mistake most gardeners make – over applying fertilizer. Keeping good notes on weather conditions, rainfall event totals, and watering schedule also helps a gardener increase in experiential-based knowledge.

It's always fun to try a new tomato variety, but in years to come, it will be very helpful to look on the notes we made concerning that new variety. It grew well, appeared to be more drought resistant than other varieties, but the taste just wasn't up to par; or possibly, it tasted great but really struggled in the heat of our summers; or maybe, it was more prone to disease, even though it claimed disease resistance. Maybe you grew a new lettuce variety that was extremely slow to bolt in the spring and still had good flavor as the weather warmed. You might have noticed some particular pest arrived earlier this year; noting that will help you to scout a little earlier next season and potentially prevent an infestation. These notes help us to plant a garden we will enjoy the benefits and successes from.

All these notes put together each season and compiled over the years will greatly enhance any gardener's skills and success. So let's grab some paper and a pen and start journaling today! You can download a journal template at go.ncsu.edu/GardenJournal. For more suggestions on garden journaling, see Appendix A of the NC Extension Gardener Handbook. Garden Journaling Appenidix A

# **PEST ALERT: DO YOU HAVE VOLES IN THOSE HOLES?**

Horticulture Agent, N.C. Cooperative Extension - Cumberland County



A few times a year I get calls from clients asking, "What is it that is making holes in my flower bed? I think it might be moles or voles, or whatever they are called."

It's unfortunate two of the most prominent mammal lawn pests have such similar names. It is easy how you can get the two names confused if you are not familiar with these pests. With that said, there is a way to help you distinguish between the two. Moles primarily feed on "meat", such as grubs, worms, and other insects. Voles on the other hand-feed only on plant parts, such as roots, stems, and bulbs. Just remember "M" for moles eat meat and "V" for voles are vegetarians. Though moles often get more attention in the landscape, in this article we are going to focus on voles.



Voles look similar to a field mouse, with 5-8 inch bodies and prominent orange teeth. Here in North Carolina, there are two primary voles that cause issues in our landscape. The Pine vole which has a reddish fur and slightly smaller size than the meadow vole, which has a dark brown fur. Pine voles spend most their time underground while Meadow voles like to reside above ground. Voles like to use their sharp front teeth to feed on plant roots, stems and bulbs and can cause lots of damage in a short amount of time.

If you suspect a certain area of your landscape is suffering from vole damage, there is a simple and safe way to check through a process called the "Apple Test." In the area of concern in your landscape, place slices of an apple at 10-15 foot intervals and then cover each slice with an ordinary flower pot. If ants become an issue, you can substitute the apple slices with bird seeds. After 24 hours check to see if the apples have been eaten or chewed on. If the apple slices or seeds are gone, that is an indicator you have voles. If the apple or seeds have not been eaten wait another few days and check again. When the monitoring is done and you have identified what areas have voles, you can then focus your plan of action on those areas.

Cultural methods of vole control include regular mowing of grass, removing weeds, and thinning excess mulch around the base of trees and shrubs. You can also install barriers such as hardware cloth around vulnerable stems to serve as physical barrier.

A nonlethal method of vole control includes trapping and releasing them to another property. Keep in mind that you must get a depredation permit from the Wildlife Biologist for your county and written permission from the landowner on whose land you release the vole.

Poa annua, (Bluegrass)



Lethal options can include mouse snap traps baited with apple or peanut butter. Set the traps so that the baited end of the trap is facing the vole exit holes. To protect pets or other wildlife, cover the trap with a flowerpot or box. Other lethal options can include poison baits; however, these must be used with cuation to ensure the safety of pets, children, and other wildlife. Always read and follow any pesticide labels carefully.

Voles can be a nuisance in landscapes, but through careful monitoring and strategic planning they can be controlled. If you have further questions, contact your local Extension agent for more information on how to control voles.

# SUSTAINABLE FEATURE: ITS TIME FOR THE BIG COVER UP

#### **ALLEN WEST**

Horticulture Agent, N.C. Cooperative Extension - Cumberland County



As I write this article, I can look out my office window and see the leaves falling from the trees in our demonstration garden. The temperatures are falling and many of the tender herbaceous plants in our garden have already succumbed to the recent frosts. Though there may not be as many tasks to do in the garden this time of year, there are still important things you can do to help your landscape be prepared for next year's growing season. One of those important tasks is mulching.

Mulching is the process of placing any organic or inorganic material on the soil surface to help improve the growing conditions for your landscape. For example, mulch can help to control weeds by preventing weed seed from germinating. If weed seed do germinate, then the mulch makes it difficult for them to penetrate through to the surface.

Another benefit mulch provides is regulating soil temperatures around the root zone of your plants. In the hot summer days mulch provides shade to the soil keeping the roots of plants cool, while in the winter it acts as a blanket, keeping roots warm. This time of year most perennials, as well as trees and shrubs, benefit from a 2–4-inch layer of mulch. It is not recommended to have mulch thicker than 4 inches.

Mulch can also help to preserve soil moisture. By keeping the soil cooler in the summer, it slows down evaporation, keeping more of the moisture in the soil for the plants to absorb. In the winter, mulch keeps the winds from drying out the soil while also preventing wind erosion. Over time, as the mulch decomposes, the added organic matter can also improve the condition of the soil, which can help beneficial water retention.

Lastly, mulching can improve the overall appearance of your landscape. It can be used to give your shrub and flower beds a nice shape or provide round curves that make mowing easier. Mulch gives areas a nice smooth, clean appearance.

There are many different types of mulch to consider adding to your landscape. Organic mulches such as shredded bark, wood chips, pine needles, and compost can be good choices. As these mulches decompose, they add organic matter and small amounts of nutrients to the soil. However, because they decompose, they will need to be replenished regularly. Inorganic mulches such as rock, pebbles, and brick chips can be good choices for adding various colors or textures to your landscape beds. Inorganic mulches last much longer than organic mulches; however, they do not improve the condition of the soil and can make future planting more difficult. Knowing the characteristics of each type of mulch can help you make an informed decision based upon your landscape needs and preferences.

One final tip to remember is to not pile mulch around the stems of trees and shrubs. This is often referred to as volcano mulching. Volcano mulching can lead to weakened roots and encourage pest problems. Again, keep the mulch layer no more than 2-4 inches thick.

Winter is a great time to add mulch to your landscapes. So, get busy and get your landscape involved in the great "cover up." If you have more specific questions about mulching, contact your local Cooperative Extension agent.