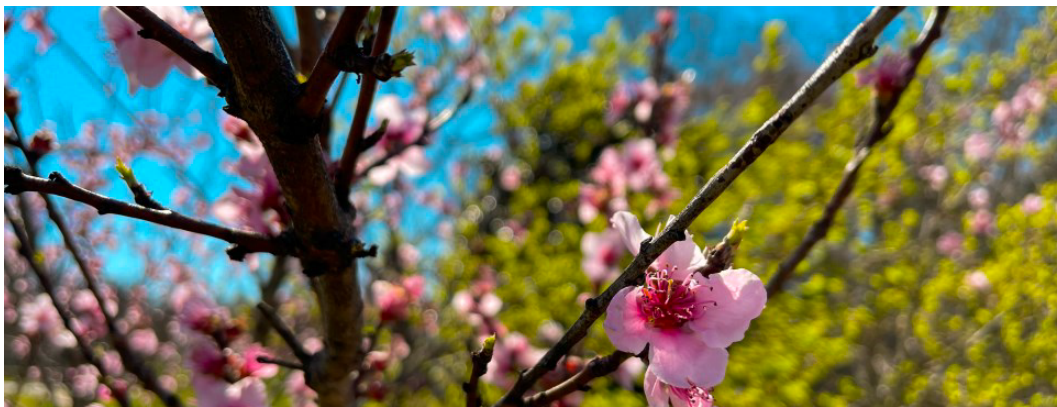




ROBESON COUNTY



THE CAROLINA SANDHILLS GARDENER

www.robeson.ces.ncsu.edu/


IMPORTANT INFORMATION



UPCOMING EVENTS

RAIN GARDEN WORKSHOP:
MAY 9, 2024
6:00 P.M. – 8:00 P.M.

ROBESON COUNTY FARMERS MARKET OPENS:
MAY 11, 2024
WEDNESDAYS 3:00 P.M. – 6:00 P.M.
SATURDAYS 7:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.
LOCATED 3RD AND WATER STREET

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 March 31. Free starting April 1. 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 910-671-32-76 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.

Mack Johnson
Mack Johnson

Extension Agent

Agriculture - Horticulture

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Gardens Need a Change of Scenery Too

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LAWNS AND TURFGRASS: SPRING MANAGEMENT IN LAWNS

2



JACOB BARBER

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

As you might have heard, Punxsutawney Phil, the groundhog, predicted we will be having an early spring. If we do, we have to prepare ourselves for spring green-up. Here are some tips you can keep in mind for once the temperature raises a little and it is time to get out into your yard.

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 blade 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 the amount of growth, which depends on temperature, fertility, moisture conditions, season, and the natural growth rate of the grass. 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. feet. 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 the lawn is not over-watered.

PLANT SPOTLIGHT: DAFFODILS ‘NARCISSUS’

3

JACOB BARBER

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



Flowers March Wake CountyCathy DeWitt

If you have not noticed, daffodils have started sprouting and blooming. There is an interesting story behind the scientific name of the daffodils. Narcissus is a Greek word that translates “to make numb.” The bulb of the daffodil contains a somewhat toxic substance that can have a numbing affect to it. Also, Narcissus comes from a Greek myth. It was once the name of a youth who became so entranced and in love with his own reflection that he pined away and he was turned into this flower, a Daffodil.

Now not only does this plant have a pretty cool back story, it also has some interesting growth characteristics. They are non-native. Their origin is northern Africa, Europe, Afghanistan, China, and Japan. This could be the reason why it is so fast growing and vigorous. They are perennial and deciduous bulbs that grow in clumps and are erect at 8 to 30 inches tall and 6 to 12 inches wide.

When adding them to your landscape, be sure to consider your site selection. Find a spot with sun to partial shade. Keep in mind the flower follows the sun. The soil should be acidic, with good drainage. They have a decent drought tolerance, but be sure to keep the soil moist. If you are looking to add these plants to your landscape, plant the bulbs in the fall. The best way to plant these are in groups of at least 6 at a time. If you are looking to plant at a larger amount, you can plant 10 to 12 bulbs per square foot with them being 2 to 3 inches apart and 8 inches deep.

These can be planted with all the same variety, or mix the varieties up to get a range of colors and sizes.

Once the flowers bloom, you can dead head or remove the flower of the plants to prevent seed formation. However, the foliage must be left alone until the leaves begin to turn yellow. Then they can be mowed or cut back. The bulbs themselves can be left in the ground to regrow for many years. If the bed gets too crowded, growth and quality of the plant may decrease. If this happens you can divide the bulbs to thin out the bed so there is enough room for proper growth. As far as pest concerns, there are not many that are detrimental. The bulbs, however, can have some rot issues in wet soils, and you should watch for bulb mites and slugs and snails.



Form: Bethany Sinnot

THE INCREDIBLE EDIBLE PERSIMMON

MACK JOHNSON

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

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Trees may not be the first plant we think of when we consider an edible landscape, but there are several fruit and nut trees we can place in our landscape that can provide beauty, shade, and edible fruit. One tree that is often overlooked is the persimmon tree. Delicious fruit when allowed to ripen fully; of course, if you ever bite into its fruit that is not ripe yet, you won't soon forget it. It can be extremely astringent.

There are two species of persimmon. The native species is referred to as the American, Common, or Eastern Persimmon. The non-native persimmon is commonly called Oriental, Japanese, or Asian Persimmon. The native persimmon tree is dioecious, which means there are male and female trees. Planting more than one tree will increase the chance of pollination and fruit set. The tree flowers in spring to early summer, and produces fruit in the fall that can remain on the tree after the leaves fall, appearing quite attractive in the winter. This tree can reach 30 to 80 feet tall and 20 to 35 feet wide. Fruit drop can pose a messy landscape, so placing it near the back of the property or in a naturalized area would work well. The fruit is nearly 3 inches in diameter.

The Oriental Persimmon is smaller in stature, reaching only 20 to 30 feet tall and 15 to 25 feet wide. These trees are also usually dioecious, (which means having the male and female reproductive organs in separate plants), but this species can have trees with both male and female flowers present, so one tree can be fruitful. It may also produce perfect flowers, which contain male and female organs so it can self-pollinate, setting fruit without another pollen source. The Oriental Persimmon can also be parthenocarpic, meaning it can set seedless fruit without any pollination. The Oriental varieties recommended for North Carolina are Fuyu, Jiro, and Hanagosho. Although it thrives in eastern NC, it cannot tolerate temperatures of 10 degrees and below.

Both species thrive in loamy, well-drained soil but can tolerate more marginal soils. They do well in full sun, but both can tolerate partial shade. They prefer neutral pH (6.0-6.5.) Both species are deciduous and offer brilliant fall colors. A tree with few pest and disease issues means a tree requiring little to no management. Both offer attributes for wildlife, pollinators, and the edible landscape.

When planting a tree, dig the hole twice as wide as the tree's rootball to allow the roots to spread and easily grow laterally. Don't dig any deeper than the roots, or roots' depth in a container, to prevent any settling over time and the trunk becoming too deep in the soil. Building a basin around the newly planted tree will enable easier watering for the first two-growing seasons. Mulch will also help conserve moisture, moderate the soil temperature, suppress weed pressure, and prevent unintentional mechanical damage.

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/eit-planttoolbox-prod/media/images/Persimmon-fall-foliage--ATIS547--CC-BY-NC-SA.jpg>



SEASONAL TIPS AND TASKS: SPRING 2024



5

MACK JOHNSON

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

Spring will soon be here! Officially, March 19th is the first day of spring, but we can expect frost until April 15th. Just saying.... Robins have been scouting my lawn every morning recently. Temperatures are warming up, and folks are ready to get out and garden. Here is a short checklist to help ensure success early in the season.

- It is time to ensure gas-powered tillers and mowers are ready for a new season as well. If you don't do this yourself, then as soon as possible would be a great time to schedule your equipment's tune up before the mad rush overwhelms your mechanics.
- Also check your hand tools, rakes, wheelbarrows, shovels, pruning tools, etc., to make sure they are in good working condition, sharpened and ready to go.
- Get your purchasing in order in case you are buying seed, compost, substrate, fertilizer, etc., so it will be available when you need it. It can be very frustrating when you run out of compost and you are amending your soil but you need it today and you won't be able to acquire any for another week. So purchase early to prevent any meltdowns you might possibly experience with poor planning.
- Double check your seed order to make sure you haven't forgotten anything.
- It's time to start your seeds indoors if you have the space and time. March 4th is 6 weeks before our last expected frost on tax day, April 15th.
- Starting seeds indoors near a bright window or on the windowsill may offer enough light but remember you may need to rotate the container to keep the seedlings growing straight.
- Check your shrubs and trees for any winter damage, such as broken limbs. Now is the time to make a proper pruning cut to remove those from your plants.
- Remember, spring-flowering shrubs bloom on old wood, so prune immediately after flowering to prevent losing next year's blooms.
- It's a good time to freshen up or replenish your mulch. Keep in mind, a layer of mulch 3 inches thick will conserve moisture, moderate the soil temperature, and reduce weed pressure.
- Winter weeds are maturing now and flowering to make seed for next year's population. Preventing seed formation involves cutting, mowing, or pulling the weeds. Consistent removal from a flower bed will eventually reduce the weed's presence.
- Start scouting your landscape, looking to prevent any insect or disease pressure before it becomes serious. Also look for any nutrient deficiencies' symptoms early on.
- Don't forget a big-brim hat that helps shade your ears and the nape of your neck, and sunscreen when you garden outdoors. You may need a new pair of garden gloves too!

Don't forget your soil test if you haven't taken one in the last 3 years.

PEST ALERT: GRAPE MYRTLE BARK SCALE

ALLEN WEST

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



Several times last summer I received a phone call from a client concerned about a white/gray “fungus” growing on the trunks of their crape myrtle trees. Some noted the fungus would “bleed” red when they scraped it. From their description, this pest was not a fungus, but instead an infestation of insects called crape myrtle bark scale. Crape myrtle bark scale, which I will refer to as CMBS, is a rather new pest to our area, appearing within the last few years. With the vast amounts of crape myrtles used in home and business landscapes, it’s a good bet many of you will probably come across this unwanted pest in the future.

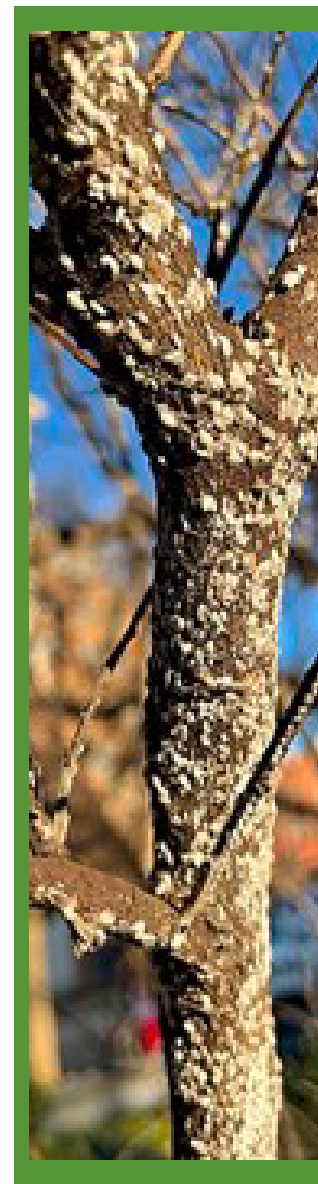
Though CMBS rarely causes crape myrtles to die, they do cause stress for the tree, resulting in less flowering. Infestations can also leave the tree as an unsightly part of the landscape. Trees infected with CMBS will develop a black covering (called “Sooty Mold”) on the stems and leaves. The Sooty Mold forms as the result of the sugary sap leftover from the feeding insects.

Females of CMBS lay between 65-300 eggs inside a white sac they form on the outside of the trunk and stems. These eggs hatch from April to May, and as they do, crawlers move to other parts of the tree. Fortunately, CMBS don’t fly, since only the males have wings. They can be transported short distances to other nearby trees by wind or by hitching a ride on a bird or other traveling insects. Humans can unknowingly spread them by not cleaning garden tools between plants.

Once you confirm you have CMBS in your landscape, there are options you can consider for treatment. Systemic insecticides applied through the soil seem to have the best results in controlling insect populations. A systemic insecticide is one that is drawn inside the plant through the roots and kills the insect as it feeds on the plant fluids. Soil-drench insecticides with the chemical name imidacloprid or dinotefuran are such examples that have been shown to be effective in controlling CMBS. The timing of treatment is important to the success of control. Soil-drench, systemic insecticides can be applied most times of year when the plants are actively growing; however, March through May is the most optimum time to treat for CMBS infestations. Keep in mind it can take a few weeks for the treatment to work, so good scouting is important to ensure that you can treat it in a timely manner. Be sure to rake away mulch from the tree when applying soil-drench insecticides to ensure good soil contact.

To monitor the effectiveness of your treatment plan, use a tool or stick to scrape the white sacs on the stems to see if they are still oozing red/pink or are dry. If the white coverings become dry, then you will know your treatment plan is working. Continue to check the infected plants periodically to stay ahead of future outbreaks, as well as monitor other susceptible plants in your landscape. As a side note, unsightly sooty mold can be removed from trees with soft brushes and mild dish soap. Water pressure can help as well as long as it is not strong enough to harm the plant. This will not help with CMBS control, but it may help with the appearance of landscape trees.

Unfortunately, it seems that CMBS will be a landscape issue to deal with in the future. If you think you have these unwanted insects in your landscape, contact your local Extension Horticulture agent for more information.



Crape Myrtle Bark Scale.
<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN1218>

SUSTAINABLE FEATURE: >>> GARDENS NEED A CHANGE OF SCENERY, TOO

ALLEN WEST

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

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I don't like to sit still for too long. In fact, just before I started typing this article, I left my office to walk around for a couple of minutes. Sometimes all that is needed to refocus my mind and get it going in the right direction is a simple change of scenery. Believe it or not, this can be true for your vegetables in your garden as well.



Let's admit it. We have all found that spot in our vegetable garden where something we like grew really well. In an effort to replicate that success we plant those same type of plants in that same spot the next year. After all, if my tomatoes flourished there last year, then they should this year, right? Maybe not.

Vegetable gardens benefit from a practice we call crop rotation. Crop rotation is a well thought out plan where you grow groups of plants in different places from year to year to help in preventing soil and pest problems. This is a well-known practice in the farming world but can often be overlooked by the home gardener.

Did you know that cucumbers, watermelons, and summer squash are in the same family? How about tomatoes, peppers, and potatoes? Vegetables within the same family are often susceptible to similar insects and diseases. When they are planted in the same area year after year, insects and diseases can accumulate and overwinter in the soil, hiding in old roots, stems and leaves. When plants within that same family are planted in the same space the next season, trouble that may have not been a problem last year can be waiting for you this year.

Nightshade Family (Solanaceae)	tomato, pepper, eggplant, potato
Gourd Family (Cucurbitaceae)	cucumber, summer squash, watermelon, cantaloupe,
Pea Family (Fabaceae)	bush bean, green bean, lima bean, pea, pole bean,
Amaryllis Family (Amaryllidaceae)	garlic, onion, shallot, green onion, scallions
Mustard Family (Brassicaceae)	broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, radish, turnips

A good place to start in implementing crop rotation in the garden is learning which families your favorite garden vegetables belong to. You can refer to the table above for a snapshot of some popular vegetables grouped by their families. For gardeners who use raised beds, you can implement a plan to plant vegetables in the same family, in the same bed and rotate those families to other beds in subsequent years. For those who use native soil gardens (in the ground), keep good records of where you grow vegetables each year and move them to other parts of the garden as much as possible.

Ideally you want to rotate crops on a 3-4 year rotation; however, if you have limited raised beds or garden space, this can be a challenge. If that is the case, then you might consider partnering with neighbors or friends to help rotate crops within their gardens. Also, you might grow certain container-friendly vegetables in containers for a season to free up garden space. Crop rotation is not meant to add stress to your gardening ventures, but it is simply to share a best practice that may help you have more success with your garden bounty. Know that any level of improvements you make to rotating your garden vegetables will be a great benefit. For more information on garden rotations in your garden, contact your local Extension Horticulture agent or local Extension Master Gardener's Volunteers.