

MOUNTAIN GARDENER

Buncombe County's Extension Newsletter for Home Lawn & Garden Enthusiasts

Buncombe County Center

March 2015

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HELPING GARDENERS PUT KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

Gardening In The Mountain Series

On **Thursday, March 19, at 10:00 am**, Alison Arnold, Consumer Horticulture Agent, will present a program titled "Pruning - Understanding the Basics". Alison will answer questions many gardeners have about pruning garden shrubs and trees and will provide a simple approach to pruning, regardless of the time of year, and the specific plant to be pruned. This program is free; however, registration is requested. Call (828) 255-5522. Location: Buncombe County Center, NC Cooperative Extension, 94 Coxe Avenue, Asheville.

2015 Gardening in the Mountains Schedule

This free series of public education programs, presented by the Buncombe County Extension Master Volunteers, addresses relevant topics of interest to anyone gardening in the region. Classes are held the 3rd Thursday of the month at 10:00 am at the Buncombe County Center of NC Cooperative Extension, 94 Coxe Avenue, Asheville. Registration is requested.

- Apr 16 Irrigation Water-Wise Gardening
- May 21 A Garden For Cutting
- Jun 18 Container Gardening
- Jul 18 Good Bug/Bad Bug
- Aug 20 Cold Weather Crops
- Sept 17 Fall Flowering Perennials, Lawns
- Oct 15 Putting the Garden to Bed

Normal March/April Weather Averages For Asheville, North Carolina

Normal Mar. Average High	58.0°	Normal Apr. Average High	67.0°
Normal Mar. Average Low	37.0°	Normal Apr. Average Low	45.0°
Normal Mar. Precipitation	3.35"	Normal Apr. Precipitation	3.03"

Hours of Daylight for Asheville, NC

	Sunrise	Sunset
March 1	7:00am	6:25pm
March 31	7:19am	7:51pm
April 1	7:17am	7:52pm
April 30	6:40am	8:16pm

Persons with disabilities and persons with limited English proficiency may request accommodations to participate in activities mentioned in this newsletter. Please contact Alison Arnold at 828-255-5522 during business hours at least 3 days prior to the event to discuss accommodations.

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Garden Chores for March

Lawns

- It won't be long before you will need the lawn mower. Is it ready to run and are the blades sharp?
- If you have not yet gotten around to the spring fertilizer application, you're almost out of time. Products containing slow-release nitrogen should be put out no later than the first week of March. Quick-release products can be applied through the end of the month.
- If crabgrass has been a problem, mid-March is a good time to spread "crabgrass preventer" for best results.
- It can be difficult to time applications of "weed and feed" products for good results. Early March would be only slightly early for the weed prevention and a little later than desired for the slow-release nitrogen.

Ornamentals

- Summer-blooming shrubs and trees such as butterfly bush, rose-of-Sharon and crepe myrtle can be pruned now.
- Do not prune spring-blooming plants until after the flowers fade.
- March is a good time to do severe pruning when overgrown shrubs need to be renovated.
- When the weather breaks, plant trees, shrubs and perennials.
- Repot and trim up houseplants. Rejuvenate hanging baskets and use cuttings to start new baskets.
- Check houseplants for insect infestations. Plants can be taken outside on a warm day for spraying, but bring them in before dark.
- Sow seeds for larkspur, poppies and snapdragons.

Fruits

- Remove straw or row covers from strawberry plants as soon as flowers appear.
- Plant all types of fruit crops.
- Prune fruit trees, grapes and brambles. Remove last year's fruiting canes and thin new canes to 3-4 per square foot.
- Fertilize all fruit crops.

Vegetables

- Mulch garlic and asparagus well to prevent early competing weeds from invading the beds.
- Early- to mid-March plant English and edible-pod peas, onions, and kale.
- Mid-March plant spinach, turnips, radishes and onions.
- Wait until late March to set out potatoes and plants of cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower.
- Start transplants indoors for tomatoes, peppers and eggplants mid-month. They will need 6 to 8 weeks to be ready for the garden.

Other

- Prepare for scouting bluebirds and clean out old bluebird boxes and mount new ones.
- Check your garden tools--make repairs, clean up and sharpen blades of saws and shovels alike.

Bring Spring Indoors

For early spring color indoors place cut stems of forsythia, quince, pussy willow and spirea in a vase to 'force' dormant flowers to open. Change the water every few days for color within 1-2 weeks. Early daffodils can be mixed with other cut flowers. Since the sap from the daffodil stems can clog stems of other plants, be sure to let the daffodils stand in water by themselves overnight before including them in a container with other flowers.

Seed Germination Test

If you have seeds on hand that are more than a couple of years old, have enough to spare, and want to know how viable they are, then a seed germination test may help you know if additional seed needs to be purchased.

To test for germination count out at least 10 seeds and place them on a damp paper towel. Roll up the towel and place it in a plastic bag and put it in a warm location. Check the towel daily for moisture and germination. It might take 3 days to 3 weeks depending on the type of seed. When you think the majority has germinated count them and calculate a percentage that grew. If more than half sprout you may need to sow more to compensate. If less than half germinate you may want to purchase a fresh supply.

Cleaning Out The Toolshed

It's a good time to clean out the toolshed or basement and prepare for the upcoming gardening season. Following the directions on the label is the best way to use products safely, especially when it comes to pesticides. If you have products you will not use up or no longer want to store, **please take measures for safe disposal**.

The Buncombe County Solid Waste Management Facility (a.k.a the Landfill) accepts hazardous waste on Fridays from Buncombe County residents. There is no charge for pesticides, herbicides, insecticides, motor oil, antifreeze and lead acid batteries. Paint and paint-related items such as water sealer, paint thinners, enamels, polyurethane, and flammable liquids (such as gas and kerosene) will be charged at \$2.00 per gallon. Visit this website for more information and to check their drop-off schedule: <http://www.buncombecounty.org/Governing/Depts/SolidWaste/>. In the future when considering methods for controlling insects, diseases and weeds, determine if the purchase and use of a pesticide is necessary, is it cost effective, and what amount do you need. Safe storage and handling is important for the safety of everyone.

Refreshing Mulch

Spring is a fine time to replenish mulch and get on top of spring germinating weed seeds like crabgrass. Since mulch breaks down and needs to be 'top dressed' every year or two, make sure that when mulch is added on top of existing mulch that the total depth does not accumulate more than 3-4 inches total. Too much mulch can encourage the plants to develop shallow roots, which becomes problematic during periods of drought. Always be sure to keep mulch at least 3-4 inches away from tree trunks and shrub stems.

What type of mulch you use is a matter of personal preference. Pine bark lasts longest but hardwood and pine needles stay put better--a good thing for trees and shrubs. Perennial and annual flower and vegetable gardens can be mulched in leaves, compost or composted bark fines and will add much-needed organic matter when the garden is cultivated over time.

2015 Perennial Plant of The Year

The Perennial Plant Association's Perennial of the Year for 2015 is *Geranium x cantabrigiense* 'Biokovo'. This cultivar of the Cambridge Geranium is an extremely easy-to-grow, low-maintenance, mounding perennial reaching 6-10" high and about 12" wide. It develops masses of pale pink flowers in late spring, is tolerant of full- sun to low-shade conditions and a variety of soil conditions although well-drained and medium-moist conditions are preferred.

The foliage is aromatic, perhaps explaining why it tolerates deer and rabbits, has nice scarlet-to-orange fall color and is semi-evergreen through the winter months. Although this plant is a groundcover type perennial and spreads by rhizomes, it is not deeply rooted and can easily be removed and managed--keeping the plant in bounds. 'Biokovo' geranium can be used as a groundcover, in front of the border and in a rock garden setting. If you've never grown a hardy geranium this is certainly one to try!



Vegetable Planting Dates for Western North Carolina

Depending on your ability to work the soil in your garden, the window of the spring garden is open! Below are some dates for specific crops.

Asparagus	Feb - Apr	Turnip	Mar 1 - May 1
Onion sets	Feb 15 - April 1	Lettuce, leaf	Mar 15 - Apr 15
Peas, Garden	Feb 15 - April 1	Lettuce, head	Mar 15 - Apr 15
Cabbage, plants	Mar 1 - Apr 15	Mustard	Mar 15 - Apr 15
Carrots	Mar 1 - Apr 15	Potatoes, white	Mar 15 - Apr 15
Kale	Mar 1- May 1	Beets	Apr 1 - May 1
Radishes	Mar 1- May 1	Broccoli, plants	Apr 1 - 30
Rutabagas	Mar 1- Apr 15	Swiss Chard	Apr 1 - May 1
Spinach	Mar 1- Apr 15		

Warm-season crops like beans, corn, cucumbers peppers, tomatoes, squash can safely be planted around May 10th--give or take a few days.

Selecting a Vegetable Garden Site

Here are a few considerations if you are a new gardener wanting to start a garden or an experienced gardener in need of a refresher on the basics for siting the garden. A good site is vital for healthy plants and good production in the vegetable garden.

Size - If you are a beginning gardener with an average-sized family an area 25 feet square should be adequate. Be careful not to start with too large a space; it is easy to “bite off more than you can chew.”

Sunlight - The garden should receive at least 6 hours of direct sunlight each day. Eight to 10 hours each day is ideal. Some leafy vegetables such as broccoli, collards, spinach, and lettuce tolerate shadier conditions than other vegetables, but if your garden does not receive at least 6 hours of sunlight daily, summer vegetables will not be productive..

Proximity to the House - The closer and easier it is to reach the garden, the more you will probably use it and keep up with jobs such as weeding, watering, insect and disease control, and succession plantings.

Soil - Garden soil should be fertile and easy to till – a loose, well-drained loam. Avoid any soil that remains soggy after a rain. Improve by adding organic matter or growing cover crops.

Water - Including rain and irrigation, the garden needs at least 1 inch of water per week. Locate the garden near a spigot, rain barrel or some other water source.

Air Drainage - Locate vegetable gardens on high ground to allow cold air to drain off. Vegetables (including small and tree fruits) are more likely to escape light or late season freezes. Frost pockets can develop at the foot of a slope, bordered by a solid fence where cold air cannot drain away.

With proper planning the garden can be both functional and attractive. Consider incorporating edible plants into the home landscape and ornamental plants such as flowering annuals into the vegetable garden. These ideas, coupled with our favorable climate, can offer gardening opportunities nearly all year long.

What’s Happening in the Garden?

Check out buncombemastergardener.org to find out. Read the latest blog post or look through past entries. Posts are short, fun to read, and offer good information compiled by your Buncombe County Extension Master Gardeners. While you are there, check out the other pages on the website. If you provide your email address on the link provided, you will be notified each time there is a new post, about twice a month.

Get an Early Start!

Getting a jump on the season can bring in earlier harvests but also help plants avoid pest problems. Here are a few ideas:

- Grow in raised beds
- Slope beds to the sun
- Run rows east and west
- Choose early varieties
- Use transplants rather than seed
- Use larger transplants
- Use hot caps or row covers and tunnels for frost protection



Growing Rhubarb

Rhubarb, a cool-season perennial edible vegetable, may not be familiar to many southern gardeners due to its lack of heat tolerance. The tangy tart leafstalks are often used for making jams, jellies and pies, and the foliage is bold and showy but inedible due to its high oxalic acid content.

Rhubarb crowns or divisions can be found now through mail-order nurseries or garden centers and when planted should be given at least 3' of space for growth.

Since it is a long-lived plant locate rhubarb in well-drained, well-amended soils with full sun and where it will not be disturbed by planting and growing annual vegetables. Cover the crown with only 1-2 inches of soil since planting rhubarb crowns too deep can delay growth. Mulch well to prevent weed competition and conserve moisture.

In order for the plant to become well established, remove flower stalks and do not harvest leafstalks the first year and then only a few the second year. Once established never harvest more than one third to one half of the leafstalks at any one time. The stalks are most flavorful when harvested early in the season and can be cut near the base soon after the leaf expands. Harvest for only 8-10 weeks to allow growth to occur the remainder of the season.

Call Before You Dig

Utility companies are more commonly delivering their services underground and often close to the surface. Service can easily be cut during any landscaping project that involves digging at any depth such as building a terrace or retaining wall, installing irrigation or drainage lines or even planting a shrub or tree. Before you bring in trenching or excavating equipment or even use a mattock or shovel, save yourself and the utility company time and money and have any and all utilities located.

Before you call, be prepared with the following information: Your phone number and address (including the county). Is your location inside or outside city limits? In a subdivision? Where exactly is the area you wish to have located? Is the area marked with WHITE paint or flags? Date you plan to do the work, how long will the work take, what type of work is it and who is it for?

Allow 48 hours for the utilities to be marked. Note that only the public utilities up to your meter will be marked. Your private septic lines or the water lines past the meter will not be located. Also be aware that the marking is not exact and will not tell you the depth of the lines. Once lines are marked, take a picture or make a map for your future reference!

Find more information on the North Carolina 811: visit www.nc811.org.



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MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Now is the time to mark you calendars for two exciting Extension Master Gardener Volunteer events.

SPRING PLANT SALE - Saturday, May 9

Extension Master Gardener Volunteers and the Blue Ridge Rose Society will sell plants and garden-related items from 10:00 am - 2:00 pm in the parking lot of the Red Cross Building at 100 Edgewood Rd, off Merrimon Ave, behind Atlanta Bread Company.

2015 GARDEN TOUR - Saturday, June 13

EXPLORE, LEARN, GROW! at the Buncombe County Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Garden Tour, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm - RAIN or SHINE.

Seven gardens will be open for your enjoyment (six residential + one school) in Biltmore Lake and surrounding area. **Advance ticket sales begin May 1** at the Buncombe County Center of North Carolina Cooperative Extension, 94 Coxe Ave., Asheville, or online at the EMGV website www.buncombemastergardener.org.

Did you know that you can receive this newsletter via email?

If you are interested, please contact us either by phone at 828-255-5522 or email at deanna_jordan@ncsu.edu.
