Mountain Gardener

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

Buncombe County Center, 94 Coxe Avenue, Asheville, NC 28801-3620 (828-255-5522)
April, 2012

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Check out Buncombe County Center’s website at:
http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu

Helping gardeners put knowledge to work.

“Spring is nature’s way of saying, “Let’s Party”.”
- Robin Williams

Celebrate National Gardening Month

Every April communities, organizations, and individuals nationwide celebrate gardening during National Garden Month. Gardeners know, and research confirms, that nurturing plants is good for us: attitudes toward health and nutrition improve, kids perform better at school, and community spirit grows. Join the celebration and help to make North Carolina a greener, healthier, more livable place—spruce up your landscape, plant a garden, start a community garden in your neighborhood, volunteer to help with a school garden.

Normal April Weather

Weather Averages
For Asheville, North Carolina

Normal April Average High 67.8°F
Normal April Average Low 42.8°F
Normal April Precipitation 3.33”

Hours of Daylight for Asheville, NC

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sunrise</th>
<th>Sunset</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>7:17am</td>
<td>7:51 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 30</td>
<td>6:39am</td>
<td>8:15 pm</td>
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Persons with disabilities and persons with limited English proficiency may request accommodations to participate in activities mentioned in this newsletter. Please contact Linda Blue at 828-255-5522 during business hours at least 3 days prior to the event to discuss accommodations.
GARDEN CHORES FOR APRIL

Lawns

- Mow fescue lawns 3 inches high.
- If you did not get the lawn fertilizer out in time (early March), just wait until September. Nitrogen applied this late is an invitation for brown patch fungus disease and other problems.
- It is also late to apply “crabgrass preventer” pre-emergent herbicide. Much of the crabgrass has already germinated so ‘preventer’ won’t help with those plants. But you may still have some effect in reducing the amount of crabgrass by catching the late germinating seeds.

Ornamentals

- The warm, moist winter has produced plenty of annual weeds. Pull weeds before applying a fresh layer of mulch to landscape beds.
- Do not remove foliage from spring bulbs until the leaves have begun to die down on their own. If you want to relocate daffodils, go ahead and dig them, with leaves attached, and replant as you would any other transplant.
- This is a great time to plant new shrubs and perennials. Do remember to keep them watered all summer.
- Do not plant tender annuals before May unless you are prepared to protect them from frost.
- Repot and renovate house plants. Cut back overgrown or leggy plants and inspect for insects. Do not move them outdoors before May, when the night time temperatures are not dipping below 50 degrees.

Fruits

- Plant both small fruit and fruit trees. Be sure to keep watered this summer.
- Pull weeds in the strawberry bed and apply fresh straw mulch around plants.
- Fertilize fruit trees, blueberries, grape vines and brambles; but not strawberries.
- If you did not get fruit trees pruned, it is better to prune late than to miss a year, especially if you are training young trees.

Vegetables

- Cool season crops can still be planted early in the month - broccoli, cabbage, lettuce and other leafy greens.
- Wait until May to plant tender crops such as tomatoes and beans.
- Have row cover fabric or other covers handy if frost sensitive plants are planted before May 10.
- Perennial herbs such as rosemary, thyme and lavender can be planted as long as the plants are hardened off (not right out of a greenhouse). Basil is very sensitive to frost, though, so do not plant it in the garden too early.

Other

- If you send soil samples in right now, you should get results back in time for the summer plantings (about 4 weeks turn-around).
- Clean and fill hummingbird feeders. The first hummers arrive in western North Carolina around April 15.
SPOTLIGHT: Dianthus

Often called cottage pinks, or cheddar pinks, Dianthus (*Dianthus gratianopolitanus*) have been garden favorites for generations.

The blue-green leaves, form a mat that provides an evergreen mound, about 3 inches high, for year-round interest. In April the pink, clove-scented flowers rise about 8 inches atop wiry stems. This is one of the small number of plants that grow best in slightly alkaline soil. So incorporate some lime along with organic material when planting. These plants are pretty tough and will tolerate dry conditions and lots of sun. The low growing foliage works well in rock gardens or the front of the border.

To keep the plant compact, and perhaps encourage some late flowers, when the blooms fade, shear the spent flower stems along with an inch of the foliage.

Many Dianthus do not hold up well in hot humid environments. An exception is the variety ‘Bath’s Pink’. This old garden plant was “rediscovered” in an Atlanta garden and reintroduced into the nursery trade in 1990. It has been on my list of favorite perennials for many years, because of the wonderful spicy fragrance when it is in bloom and the year-round effect of the gray-green evergreen foliage.

In the last couple of years ‘Bath’s Pink’s’ top status is being challenged in my garden by the variety ‘Firewitch’, the 2006 Perennial Plant Association Plant of the Year. This new contender starts to bloom a couple of weeks later, but has the advantage of providing a few sporadic blooms during the summer. The flowers are equally fragrant and the leaves are a little different shade of green.

Sign Up for Email

Extension Master Gardener Volunteers are trained by NC Cooperative Extension to assist with providing educational information to area citizens. They offer gardening information by staffing a Garden Hotline, conducting Saturday Plant Problem Clinics, staffing Ask A Gardener information tables at many local events and offering lectures and garden schools. If you would like to be included in monthly email updates of coming educational opportunities offered by Master Gardeners, you can sign up by sending an email with “ADD” in the subject line to: buncombemastergardener@gmail.com.

Please note that this address is only for signing up for the e-news. For gardening and other questions, please continue to call 255-5522 for the Master Gardener Hotline, which is open M-Th 8:30—4:30 and Friday 8:30 to 12:30.

Ask a Gardener Tables

You will also frequently find Extension Master Gardeners staffing an Ask a Gardener information table at area events such as the Herb Festival, Days in the Gardens at the Botanical Gardens, Nature Center Events, Asheville Homebuilders Expo and the Mountain State Fair. This year they will also be available to provide gardening information at the Asheville City Tailgate Market the 1st Saturday each month, beginning May 5.
Almanac Gardener is Back

Almanac Gardener begins its 29th season as the most popular locally produced program on UNC-TV on Saturday, April 7 at noon.

Almanac Gardener is a half-hour home horticulture program airing for 20 weeks, from April through August. It is one of the longest running series on UNC-TV and is a co-production of UNC-TV and Cooperative Extension at North Carolina State University.

Gardening in the Mountains

Extension Master Gardeners of Buncombe County are again offering their monthly lecture series. Programs will be the 3rd Wednesday each month, 10:00 am at the Buncombe County Extension Center. The lectures are free and no pre-registration is required.

April 18 - Gardening with Children
May 16 - Planting for Pollinators

WE HAVE RAIN BARRELS!

The NC Cooperative Extension, Buncombe County Center, has rain barrels available for sale. The 80 gallon barrels come complete with fittings and installation instructions. Barrels may be purchased for $110 + tax at the Extension office at 94 Coxe Ave., Asheville. For more information call 255-5522.

Tips for Growing Herbs

One definition of an herb is “any useful plant.” They may be used to flavor food, scent pourpouries or as medicines. Most are not difficult to grow. Here are a few tips to get started.

1. Know the requirements for each plant. Most herbs grow best in full sun and well drained soil.
2. Improve soil drainage with pine bark soil conditioner and/or gravel.
3. Most herbs require the soil pH of 5.5 to 6.5. Test soil and lime if needed.
4. Many herbs do not need much fertilizer, and in fact flavor may not be as intense if too much nitrogen is used.
5. Most herb plants benefit from regular harvesting. Frequent cutting encourages continued new growth.
6. Although most herbs have few pest problems, keep an eye out for aphids or caterpillars so they can be controlled promptly.
7. Mulch to conserve moisture, but wait until the soil warms up as most herbs grown best in warm conditions.
8. Many herbs are of Mediterranean origin and are very drought tolerant. These should not be over watered. Some such as mints prefer moist conditions.

The WNC Herb Festival takes place May 4, 5 and 6 at the WNC Farmers’ Market. Join in the festivities to learn more about herbs, purchase plants and find prepared products.
ALL AMERICAN SELECTIONS

Each year the All-America Selections committee tests many new varieties of flowers and vegetables in trial gardens all over the US and Canada. Winners are selected based on unique or improved qualities and their performance across the many locations. Here are some of this year’s winners.

Ornamental Pepper “Black Olive’

The AAS Judges said this entry was a standout, especially in the southern gardens where heat was a major presence during the 2011 trials. All season long this beauty kept its upright habit with nicely draping leaves and dark purple/black fruit which appeared in small clusters along the stems. As summer progresses, the fruits mature to red giving a beautiful contrast against the dark purple foliage and bright purple flowers. This is multi-use ornamental can be used as a 20” border plant, a great color splash for containers or as a cut flower in mixed bouquets.

Pepper ‘Cayennetta’ F1

‘Cayennetta’ is an excellent tasting mildly spicy pepper that is very easy to grow. This 3 to 4 inch chili pepper yielded bigger fruits from a very well branched upright plant that required no staking which would make it perfect for a container or patio planter. Unique to this variety is that it has good cold tolerance as well as dense foliage cover to protect the fruits from sun scorch and it handled extreme heat very well.

Salvia ‘Summer Jewel Pink’

‘Sister to earlier AAS Winner Salvia ‘Summer Jewel Red’, this dwarf sized, compact plant has a prolific bloom count throughout the growing season. As a bonus, the blooms appear almost two weeks earlier than other pink salvias used as comparisons. And of course, the hummingbirds love all salvias.

Vinca ‘Jams ’N Jellies Blackberry

Unique, velvety deep purple with white eye, this flower color will add excitement to summer gardens. In some settings, the flower petals appear almost black. Easy to grow plants have excellent tolerance to drought and heat. Mature plants will reach 10-14 inches tall.

Watermelon ‘Faerie’ F1

‘Faerie’ is a non-traditional watermelon in that it has a creamy yellow rind with thin stripes yet still yields sweet pink-red flesh with a high sugar content and crisp texture. Home gardeners will like growing something unique in their garden and the fact that the vines are vigorous yet spread only to 11 feet meaning it takes up less space in the garden. Each 7-8” fruit weighs only four to six pounds.
COMING EVENTS

- **April 7 & 21**  **Plant Problem Clinic**, by Extension Master Gardeners, WNC Farmers’ Market. 11:00 - 2:00 in the breezeway between the retail buildings.

- **April 14 & 28**  **Backyard Composting Demo**, by Extension Master Gardeners, WNC Farmer’s Market, 11:00am - 2pm beside Israel’s Garden Center.

- **April 18**  **Gardening in the Mountains Series**, “Gardening with Children”, presented by Extension Master Gardeners, at the NC Cooperative Extension—Buncombe County Center, 94 Coxe Ave., Asheville. 10:00am, FREE, no pre-registration required.

- **April 27—28**  **Days in the Garden.** Botanical Gardens at Asheville
  Friday, 1-6 pm, plant sales
  Saturday, 8am - 3 pm, plants, food, crafts, entertainment, guided walks.

- **May 4—6**  **Spring Herb Festival.** WNC Farmers’ Market
  Friday and Saturday, 9am—5pm, Sunday 10am—3pm
  Plants, herbal products, crafts, garden information, educational programs.