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

Normal Jan./Feb. Weather - Averages
For Asheville, North Carolina

Normal January Average High 46.1 °F
Normal January Average Low 26.6 °F
Normal January Precipitation 3.07”

Normal February Average High 50.3 °F
Normal February Average Low 29.1 °F
Normal February Precipitation 3.19”

Hours of Daylight for Asheville, NC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Sunrise</th>
<th>Sunset</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 1</td>
<td>7:40 am</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 31</td>
<td>7:32 am</td>
<td>5:55 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 1</td>
<td>7:31 am</td>
<td>5:56 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 29</td>
<td>7:01 am</td>
<td>6:24 pm</td>
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Helping gardeners put knowledge to work.

“Humanity, despite its artistic pretensions, its sophistication and its many accomplishments, owes it existence to a six inch layer of topsoil and the fact that it rains” - Anonymous

SURFING THE WEB

Much of our “armchair gardening” is now done in front of a computer screen. A good place to start for reliable North Carolina based information is our Buncombe County Cooperative home page at: http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu. For a quick search, enter your topic in the search box at the top of the page. You might also check out the NCSU Urban Horticulture page at: http://ncstate-plants.net. From either site you can find horticulture publications or links to other departments.

Most state universities now have a lot of garden publications available on line. Pay attention to the origin as information on plant selection or planting dates from Florida or Minnesota will not be appropriate to western North Carolina. You can also find lots of information at web sites for specialty groups such as the American Rose Society, American Orchid Society, Rock Garden Society, American Hosta Society..and just about any other plant group you can think of.

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 January

**Lawns**
- Use this time to get the mower into the shop for a tune up and sharpening.
- Then you should be able to take a break from the lawn the rest of the month.

**Ornamentals**
- This is a good time to do selective pruning on shade trees. Make a clean cut at the branch collar. Refer to “Pruning Trees, Flushcuts and Wound Dressings” at [http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-602.html](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-602.html)
- Evergreen shrubs may be pruned now too.
- Cut back ornamental grasses, as well as liriope and mondo grass, before spring growth begins.
- Inspect house plants for insect infestations such as spider mites, scales and whiteflies.

**Fruits**
- Plant fruit trees, grape vines and brambles.
- Prune grape vines and highbush blueberries.
- Videos on pruning are available for loan from the Extension office.
- It is best not to prune fruit trees until March, especially peaches.

**Vegetables.**
- Start your garden plan on paper as you browse the garden catalogs. This will help prevent ordering more than you have room to plant.
- After checking your seed inventory, make a list and place seed orders for things you may not be able to find locally.
- When the soil dries out enough to work, go ahead and prepare a spot for the late February planting of peas and kale.
- If you are maintaining winter vegetables in a greenhouse or under plastic tunnels, remember that venting on sunny days will be important to prevent over-heating.

**Other**
- Use deicing salt sparingly. Sweep excess off the pavement as soon as it has dried to avoid too much runoff into adjacent landscape areas or into the water supplies.

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**Wood Ashes in the Garden**

If you have been using a fireplace or woodstove this winter, you probably have plenty of ashes to dispose of by now. Wood ashes can be spread around garden areas, with some care.

The nutrient content of wood ashes varies, depending on the types of wood burned. They usually contain approximately 2% phosphate and 5 -10% potassium.

But the more important quality of ashes is their alkalinity. They are about 1/3 to 1/2 as strong as lime in neutralizing soil acidity. This means you should treat them like lime and only apply ashes to soil where the pH is below 6. You would also never want to spread ashes around acid-loving plants such as azaleas, rhododendrons and blueberries. If you have been applying wood ashes to garden areas it would be wise to have the soil pH tested before applying more. You do not want to get the pH of the soil above 7.
Garden Chores for February

Lawns
• Think Spring! This is the month for the spring application of slow-release fertilizer to the lawn.
• Bare spots can be seeded late in the month.
• If you have not had the mower serviced, do it before you need it.

Ornamentals
• Check landscape beds for winter weeds. Pull bittercress and chickweed before they flower.
• Many varieties of shrubs can be pruned back severely to renovate old overgrown plants. The best time to do this is late February or March.
• Keep in mind that needled evergreens will not re-sprout if cut back into old wood (beyond all the needles).
• And do not prune spring bloomers until after they have flowered or you will remove the bloom buds.
• In the perennial garden finish cleaning up dead stems and grasses.
• This might be a good time to give house plants a little TLC. Repot pot-bound plants, cut back leggy vines, remove dead leaves and give them a nice leaf wash in the shower or sink.

Fruits
• Mature apple and pear trees can be pruned, but do not prune young fruit trees, peaches or plums before March.
• Spray dormant oil, especially if you have had a problem with mites or scale. You will need a day when temperatures are above 45°F and are not predicted to drop below freezing for 24 hours.
• All fruit crops can be planted now through spring.

Vegetables
• English and edible-pod peas, spinach, kale, onions and a few other cold hardy crops can be planted in late February through March.
• This is an excellent time to plant an asparagus bed. The bed preparation is a lot of work, but worth the effort. See “Home Garden Asparagus Production” at: http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/pdf/hil-8002.pdf
• Mow cover crops in preparation for turning. Go ahead and turn them under if the soil is not too wet.

Other
• Clean out bird houses and put up new ones. Bluebirds and some other songbirds start scouting for spring nest boxes in February.
• Use a nice winter day to clean out the garden storage area. Check garden tools and equipment before they are needed. Sharpen and make repairs now.

Speakers Bureau
If you need a speaker for a program for your civic group or garden club this year, we may be able to help. The Master Gardeners’ Speakers Bureau can offer programs on a variety of gardening topics. To line up a speaker, call the Extension office at 255-5522 and we will put you in touch with the coordinator.
Spotlight: Hardy Camellias

Although camellias have been grown in China for centuries, it was not until the 20th Century that they became popular with American gardeners. For most of that time camellias were the domain of southern gardens, with gardeners in zone 6 having little luck unless one was fortunate enough to have a protected alcove. In recent years plant hybridizers have made progress in developing much more cold hardy varieties.

Camellias are of particular interest to many gardeners because they have dark green evergreen foliage and flower in winter or very early spring, depending on the cultivar. They grow best in well drained soil with pH of 5.5 to 6.5, in partial shade. They will grow fine in full sun, with adequate moisture, but will be more subject to leaf scorch in winter.

From 2000 through 2003, researchers at the Mountain Horticultural Research and Extension Center in Mills River tested numerous Camellia hybrids. Plants were rated in late winter for the amount of winter injury and flowering. Below are the varieties recommended based on their observations.

Most recommended for cold hardiness: ‘Spring’s Promise,’ ‘Winter’s Interlude,’ ‘Pink Icicle,’ ‘April Blush,’ ‘April Remembered’ and ‘Snow Man.’


Try Air-Layering

With age, some house plants have a tendency to become too tall and loose their lower leaves. One way to get a new start with some of these plants is to propagate the plant by air-layering. Air-layering is commonly used with woody stemmed plants like rubber trees, ficus trees, dieffenbachia and dracaenas.

Air-layering is usually most successful with younger growth, so select a section of stem about a foot from the tip. Wound the stem by scraping off the bark about an inch in length and 1/2 to all the way around the stem. Dusting lightly with a rooting hormone may speed rooting. Take a handful or two of sphagnum moss and soak in water. Squeeze to remove excess water and wrap around the wounded stem. Cover with a piece of plastic and secure at both ends with twist ties or tape.

Be patient. in a couple of months white roots should be visible through the plastic. The new rooted cutting is now ready to be on its own. Cut the stem just below the roots, remove the plastic and pot up the new plant. Keep out of direct sunlight until it begins to grow.
Got Voles?

Q: Some of our spring bulbs did not come up and it appears something has been eating them. The stems of some nearby junipers have also been damaged. We’ve been told that we may have voles. What can we do about them?

A: There are two species of voles in our area, both about the size of a field mouse. Meadow voles live and feed above ground in areas where grasses, other low plants or even mulch provide cover. The pine voles make shallow tunnels beneath the surface. Both are vegetarians, gnawing roots, bulbs and the stems of plants. (Moles, no relation, make raised tunnels at the surface and eat grubs and worms).

To see if voles are active in your garden you can use the “apple test”. Place a 1/2 inch cube of apple under a board or other shelter that is propped up 3-4 inches off the ground so that the animal can get underneath. You might want to place several of these test stations around your garden. If the apple’s gone after several days you can use a snap-type mouse trap baited with apple or peanut butter in the same location. For more details on identifying and trapping voles contact the Buncombe County Extension office for the leaflet “Voles in Horticultural Plantings” or find it at: http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/agpubs/Ag_472_3.pdf

Alternatively there is a rodenticide available called Rozol. However it can only be used for pine voles as it must be placed down in their tunnels, out of reach of other animals. After several weeks of baiting, you can use the apple test to see if voles are still present.

Still another solution for pine voles, is to plant bulbs, hostas and other susceptible plants in products like Permatill or Vole Bloc. These can be likened to sharp pebbles and are worked into the soil around vulnerable plants to discourage underground vole activity. Note that the product label instructs that you will need to either plant in a good volume of the gravel or create a “wall” with it around the plant’s root zone.

Mountain Gardener Index 2011

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EVENTS

- **March 3 & 4**  17th Annual Organic Growers School, UNC-Asheville. For more information and registration: [http://www.organicgrowersschool.org](http://www.organicgrowersschool.org)

- **Ongoing**  RAIN BARREL SALE: Buncombe County Cooperative Extension has 80 gallon rain barrels available for $110 +tax at 94 Coxe Ave., Asheville, NC. To check availability call 255-5522.