Helping gardeners put knowledge to work.

“Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders” - Henry David Thoreau

Opportunities to Learn

Before we really get busy in the garden, March offers numerous opportunities to learn about gardening. See inside for more details.

March 5 & 6. Organic Growers School. See [website]

March 21. Backyard Small Fruit
March 28. Starting a Vegetable Garden
April 9. Spring Garden School. See [website]

Also check out offerings at the following:
Botanical Gardens at Asheville: [website]
The NC Arboretum: [website]
Bullington Center: [website]

Normal March Weather
Weather Averages
For Asheville, North Carolina

Normal March Average High 58°F
Normal March Average Low 36.2°F
Normal March Precipitation 3.89"

Hours of Daylight for Asheville, NC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Sunrise</th>
<th>Sunset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 1</td>
<td>7:01 am</td>
<td>6:24 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 31</td>
<td>7:19 am</td>
<td>7:50 pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 March

Lawns
- If last summer’s drought left your lawn with a lot of bare spots, early March is a good time to scratch in some tall fescue or bluegrass seed.
- Have you had the mower tuned up and the blade sharpened? Mow frequently enough to remove no more than 1/3 of the blade at a time.
- If you had a lot of crabgrass last year, you may want to consider applying a pre-emergent herbicide to prevent crabgrass seeds from germinating. This is most effective when done before the end of March.
- It is about too late for the spring fertilizer application. If you did not put out the slow release fertilizer in February, consider just using a quickly released material, such as 10-10-10 this month.

Ornamentals
- If overgrown shrubs are in need of renovation, this would be the time to cut them back. Although most broadleaf shrubs will eventually recover from severe pruning, needled evergreens will not.
- Finish cleaning up the perennial bed and cutting back ornamental grasses and liriope.
- Spread slow release fertilizer around ornamental plantings—trees, shrubs, perennial beds.
- This is a good time to treat hemlock trees for Hemlock Woolly Adelgids. For information see: http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/O&T/trees/note119a/note119a.htm
- Plant trees, shrubs and perennials if the ground is not too wet.
- House plants that have gotten leggy can be cut back. Cut above a leaf node far down on the stem so the plant can regain a bushier form.

Fruits
- Prune fruit trees, blueberries and grapes. The Buncombe County Extension office has videos available for loan on pruning blueberries and fruit trees.
- Fruit trees require attention to pest control. For the home orchard guide see: http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/pp/notes/Fruit/fdin002/fdin002.htm
- This is still a fine time to plant all fruit crops.

Vegetables
- It’s time to plant! Well, at least the cool season vegetables. In early March we can plant green peas, kale, spinach, turnips, carrots, beets, radishes and onions.
- In the middle of the month you can direct seed lettuce and plant potatoes.
- Transplant broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage mid to late month.
- It takes about 6 weeks to grow transplants for tomatoes, peppers and eggplants. The last week in March gives you about the right amount of time to plant seeds to be ready to plant the second week in May.
- Start an asparagus bed. For information see: http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/pdf/hil-8002.pdf

Other
- Check garden tools and equipment. Clean, sharpen and repair everything before you need it.

Recommendations for the use of chemicals are included in this publication as a convenience to the reader. The use of brand names and any mention or listing of commercial products or services in this publication does not imply endorsement by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension nor discrimination against similar products or services not mentioned. Individuals who use chemicals are responsible for ensuring that the intended use complies with current regulations and conforms to the product label. Be sure to obtain current information about usage and examine a current product label before applying any chemical. For assistance, Contact an agent of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension.
2011 Perennial Plant of the Year

The Perennial Plant Association’s Perennial of the Year for 2011 is Arkansas Blue Star, *Amsonia hubrichtii*. From late spring to early summer, two-to three-inch wide clusters of small, light blue star-shaped flowers are displayed above the fern-like foliage. The soft green provides nice filler in the perennial bed in spring and summer. But perhaps what sets *Amsonia* apart from other selections in the perennial garden is the lovely yellow-golden color the foliage displays in the fall.

*Amsonia* grows 36 inches tall and 36 inches wide in a mounded form. This hardy perennial grows in hardiness zones 4 through 9 and is a versatile North American native. It thrives in full sun to partial shade, and average soil. Once established it is quite drought tolerant.

Bring Spring Indoors

For early spring blooms indoors, try cutting some stems from forsythia, quince, pussy willow and spirea to “force” into bloom. Place stems in a vase and they should bloom in a week or two. Change the water every few days.

Early daffodil varieties are some of the first flowers to bloom in late February and March. If you want to mix daffodils with other cut flowers, though, you need to take extra steps. The sap from daffodil stems can clog the stems of other plants. Let the daffodils stand in water by themselves overnight before including them in a container with other flowers.

Time for Mulch

This is a fine time to replenish the mulch in landscape beds. Mulch is the first line of defense against annual weeds. Mulch prevents weed seed from germinating by excluding light. Since many weeds (like crabgrass) germinate in April, the goal is to spread the mulch before weeds germinate.

Organic mulches do break down and need to be “top dressed” every year or two. When adding mulch overtop of existing mulch, make sure the total depth does not accumulate to more than 3 to 4 inches as too much is detrimental to your plants.

What kind of mulch you use is pretty much a matter of preference—what look you like. Pine bark lasts longest, but hardwood and pine needles stay put better on a slope.
The Early Vegetable Garden

Nothing makes a gardener feel more like spring is around the corner than working the soil and planting those first early vegetable seeds. I usually aim for the last week in February or first week in March to plant the green peas and kale. You could also plant spinach, turnips, radishes and onions. By the middle of March we should be able to set out the transplants of lettuce, cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli, unless some extremely cold temperatures are in the forecast. Late March is also potato planting time.

This early planting is where raised beds filled with nice loose, well drained, soil really pay off. Not only does the soil warm up faster than flat ground, it dries out sooner so it can be worked earlier. If you turn some soil with a shovel, it should break apart easily. If it stays in sticky clumps when you tap the soil ball, it will form clods if you try to till it or even turn it by hand. You will be stuck with those clods the rest of the season, so let it dry a few more days and try again.

Almanac Gardener

The popular Almanac Gardener program returns to UNC-TV on April 9 at 12 noon, and will run weekly through August 20. This production of North Carolina Cooperative Extension and UNC-TV has been providing timely gardening advice for North Carolina gardeners for 28 years.

Planting Rhubarb

One of the perks of living in western North Carolina is that we can grow some plants that are better adapted to more northern climates. Rhubarb is a spring treat that is not so familiar to southern gardeners. Rhubarb is grown for its edible petioles (leaf stalks) which are tart and used for making jams, jellies, and especially pies. The leaves of rhubarb are large and showy in the garden, but they are inedible because the high content of oxalic acid can cause poisoning.

Rhubarb is a perennial typically planted as crowns or divisions. This time of year you may find crowns at garden centers or mail order sources. Since this is a perennial crop amend the soil well with organic amendments. Plant the crowns about 3 feet apart. The top of the crown should be only about an inch below the soil line.

Do not harvest stalks the first year. If growth is good, 3 to 4 stems may be harvested from each crown the second year. A few more stems may be taken each year, up to a maximum of 8 to 10 weeks of harvest.
Spring Garden School: April 9

The annual Spring Garden School is offered by Extension Master Gardeners of Buncombe County. This all day Saturday event will offer a series of classes on “Smart Gardening for Western North Carolina” and will be held at Ferguson Auditorium on the A-B Tech Campus. The program is on April 9, and you must pre-register to attend. Cost is $12.

Register by dropping by the Cooperative Extension office at 94 Coxe Ave. Asheville, or by printing and mailing registration from http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu

Gardening in the Mountains

The Extension Master Gardeners’ popular Gardening in the Mountains programs will resume this month and run through October. The lectures will be the third Wednesday each month from 10:00 to 11:00. They will be at the Cooperative Extension office, 94 Coxe Ave. Asheville. The programs are free and no pre-registration is required.

The first program will be March 16 on Spring Lawn Care.

Home Grown Fruit and Vegetable Classes

March 21. Backyard Small Fruits. Many small fruits are not difficult to grow in western North Carolina. Learn about strawberries, blackberries, blueberries and grapes suitable for backyard production, 5:30-7:00 pm at the Buncombe County Extension office. $5 at the door. You MUST pre-register by calling 255-5522.

March 28. Starting a Vegetable Garden. The freshest, most nutritious vegetables come from your own garden. You don’t need a lot of space to grow your own vegetables, 5:30—7:00 pm at the Buncombe County Extension office. $5 at the door. You MUST pre-register by calling 255-5522.

Celebrate Arbor Day

This year North Carolina Arbor Day is March 19. National Arbor Day is the last Friday in April.

We traditionally celebrate Arbor Day by planting a tree. But the day is also intended to remind us of the importance of maintaining healthy trees. Healthy trees are an asset to our national environment, our urban setting and the aesthetics and value of our home landscape.

Planting a tree is a great thing to do, but we also have a commitment to take care of the wonderful mature trees we already have. If you damage a 150 year old oak tree during a construction project or by topping, how long will it take to grow a new one when it is gone? It is awesome to look at that old tree and contemplate that it was alive when my great, great grandfather was alive. If we plant a tree today, we can only hope that those who come after us will protect it so our great, great grandchildren can play in its shade.
EVENTS

• March 5 & 6  Organic Growers School, UNC-Asheville.

• March 16  Gardening in the Mountains, Spring Lawn Care, 10:00 - 11:30am at the Buncombe County Extension Office. Free, no registration required.

• March 21  Backyard Small Fruit, 5:30 -7:00pm at the Buncombe County Extension Office. $5. Pre-registration required. Space is limited.

• March 28  Starting a Vegetable Garden, 5:30 -7:00pm at the Buncombe County Extension office. $5. Pre-registration required. Space is limited.

• April 9  Spring Garden School: Presented by Extension Master Gardeners - AB Tech Ferguson Auditorium. Pre-registration required.

Another Coming Event