

# MOUNTAIN GARDENER

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

Buncombe County Center

January/February 2015

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## HELPING GARDENERS PUT KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

### Gardening in the Mountains Series

The Extension Master Gardeners' popular **Gardening in the Mountains Series** is back starting February 19 with "Growing Vegetables in Containers" by Master Gardener John Hew. This lecture series will be the third Thursday of each month from 10:00 to 11:00 am until October. Programs will be held at the Buncombe County Center of NC Cooperative Extension, 94 Coxe Avenue, Asheville.

Although they are free and no preregistration is required, please call 828-255-5522 to confirm your attendance.

### Extension Master Gardener Help Line

To help answer your gardening questions, the EMGV Helpline and Walk-In Service will resume on March 2, 2015. Office hours typically are Monday through Thursday (9:30 am - 3:30 pm) and Friday (9:30 am - 12:30 pm). Call 828-255-5522 or visit the Cooperative Extension Center at 94 Coxe Avenue, Asheville.

Free parking is provided in Lot 16 across the street (NW corner of Coxe and Hilliard). Please bring samples large enough for diagnosis and identification.

### Normal January/February Weather Averages For Asheville, North Carolina

Normal Nov. Average High	58.8°	Normal Dec. Average High	49.5°
Normal Nov. Average Low	35.8°	Normal Dec. Average Low	29.3°
Normal Nov. Precipitation	3.65"	Normal Dec. Precipitation	3.59"

### Hours of Daylight for Asheville, NC

	Sunrise	Sunset
January 1	7:40am	5:28pm
January 31	7:31am	5:57pm
February 1	7:30am	5:58pm
February 28	7:02am	6:24pm

**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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## **Please Don't Top Trees!**

Winter can be a good time to prune trees when the leaves are out of the way and it's easier to work. Correct pruning is essential to maintaining tree health. Topping is an unacceptable pruning technique that can lead to eventual decline and death. For information on tree pruning visit [www.treesaregood.com](http://www.treesaregood.com), and for pruning specific plants visit <http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/21486.pdf>

### **Some important reasons NOT to top a tree:**

1. Large wounds created by topping do not always heal properly; disease and decay can enter leading to hazardous conditions over time.
2. A topped branch will either die or produce multiple sprouts that quickly grow back in greater numbers but weaker than the original branches.
3. A tree that becomes stressed from topping can be more vulnerable to insect and disease infestations.
4. More money will be spent over time, either to re prune the tree or to remove it.
5. It's ugly.

## **Improving Garden Soil With Cover Crops**

It's not too late! Cover crops provide huge benefits to soil health such as suppressing weeds and diseases and adding organic matter and nutrients to the soil which in turn feeds soil organisms and helps grow healthy plants. While early fall is prime time to plant some types of winter cover crops, planting late winter or early spring can also provide benefit for the summer and fall garden if grown even for a couple of months.

**Cover Crops Versus Green Manures** - Cover crops are seeded directly into empty garden spaces and can be grown for several weeks or even months. Cover crops that are tilled into the soil still green and living are called green manures. Tilling crops into the soil adds nutrients to the soil and increases organic matter, and is much like growing compost directly in the garden.

Some cover crops are simply mown down and left on the soil surface at the end of the season. Vegetable transplants can be planted directly in the remains left by these crops, which acts as a mulch, holding moisture in the soil and suppressing weed growth. Several varieties of legumes, grains, and mustard relatives can be grown as cover crops or green manures. Each has its benefits.

**Legumes** - Members of the pea and clover family, known as legumes, add nitrogen to the soil by capturing nitrogen from the air and making it available to plants, providing a natural source of fertilizer. Including an inoculant for maximum N fixation might be needed. Types of legumes commonly grown as winter cover crops include crimson clover, Austrian winter pea, and hairy vetch.

For best results legume cover crops are sown by mid-October and again mid-March. Plan to till these into the soil early spring, as soon as they begin to flower or at least several weeks before planting the garden. You can till the crop directly into the soil or mow it first and then till it in. Either way, you will get the greatest increase in nitrogen by mixing these crops into the soil rather than simply mowing them and leaving them on the surface.

**Grains & Grasses** - Grains and grasses that are grown as cover crops include annual ryegrass, cereal rye, wheat, oats, and barley. They can take colder temps and can be planted a little later than legumes, from October through mid-November and also in mid-March for a late-season cover. Grains and grasses are the best cover crop choice for weed suppression, especially when they are mown and left on the soil surface rather than tilled into the soil. These cover crops are often seeded mixed with legumes like crimson clover and hairy vetch at a rate of 3 parts grain to 2 parts legume.

Radishes, mustards and other greens can also be sown as a cover crop and are good for early fall or late spring. Depending on your crop rotation plan and the sowing or planting dates of your spring, summer or fall garden, cover crops can be used throughout the year to benefit the soil and the plants you grow.

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## **January Garden Chores**

### **Lawns**

- This is a good time to get your mower tuned up and sharpened along with other equipment and hand tools.

### **Ornamentals**

- Cut back ornamental grasses as well as liriopé and mondo grass.
- If you didn't get all the spring bulbs planted before the ground froze, try to get them in now. Sort through and discard any that are soft.
- Plant your live Christmas tree as soon as possible. Keep it outdoors in a protected spot--out of direct sun and wind--until planting time.
- Inspect houseplants for insects such as spider mites, scale and whiteflies. Treat as needed.

### **Fruits**

- Plant fruit trees, grapes and brambles.
- Prune grape vines and highbush blueberries.
- Apply fresh mulch on blueberries to keep shallow roots cool and weed free.
- Do not prune fruit trees until March--especially peaches.

### **Vegetables**

- Check your seed supply before ordering more. Seeds more than a couple of years old should probably be replaced. Do a germination test if in doubt.
- Start your garden plan on paper as you browse garden catalogs. Review last year's notes or memories for what worked and how much was too much.
- If the soil is dry enough to work, go ahead and prepare a spot for a late February planting of peas and kale.
- If you have any winter vegetables in a greenhouse or under plastic, remember to vent on sunny days to prevent over heating.

### **Other**

- Use deicing salt sparingly. Sweep excess off pavement as soon as it has dried. This prevents runoffs into adjacent landscape areas and into the water supplies.

## **February Garden Chores**

### **Lawns**

- Now is a good time for the spring application of a slow-release lawn fertilizer.
- If you have bare spots, late February and early March are good times to over seed.

### **Ornamentals**

- Shade trees often get enough fertilizer from adjacent lawns that are fertilized. If additional nutrients are needed, apply now to the soil surface.
- Spray dormant oil, especially if you have had a mite or scale problem. Wait for daytime temperatures to reach 45 degrees and are not predicted to drop below freezing for 24 hours.
- Evergreen shrubs can be pruned. Keep in mind that needled evergreens will not resprout if cut back into old wood or beyond the needles.
- 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 or overgrown growth.
- Late February or March is the best time to do this.
- Clean up dead stems and grasses in the perennial garden.

### **Fruits**

- Mature apple and pear trees can be pruned. Wait until March to prune young fruit trees, peaches and plums.
  - Again spray dormant oil, especially if you have had a mite or scale problem.
  - All fruit crops can be planted now through spring.
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## Vegetables

- English and edible pea pods, spinach, kale, onions and a few other cold-hardy crops can be planted late February through March.
- This is an excellent time to plant the asparagus bed. Thorough bed preparation is important.\*
- Mow or cut back cover crops and turn whenever the soil isn't too wet to work.

## Other

- Clean out birdhouses and set up new ones. Bluebirds and some other songbirds start scouting for spring nesting boxes in February.
- Don't forget to take time to clean out and organize the garden storage area. Check garden tools and equipment before you need them. Brush off dirt from shovels and hard rakes and apply a light oil to prevent rust from developing.

**\*Note:** For more information on these topics, visit our website at:  
<http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu/> go to the Lawn and Garden link on the left side.

## Thanks to Our Outstanding Volunteers!

Extension Master Gardener<sup>SM</sup> Volunteers help thousands of Buncombe County gardeners resolve plant problems and improve gardening practices. Thank you Master Gardeners for your dedication to consumer horticulture education in Buncombe County. Below is the list of EMG's recognized for their service at the November 13, 2014 Recognition Luncheon Event.



**Volunteer of the Year Award:** Debbie Green

**Muddy Boots Award:** Nan Dauphine, Marilyn Lonon

**Twenty-Five Year Award:** Glenn Palmer

**Twenty-Year Awards:** Barbara Applebaum, Lewis Applebaum

**Fifteen-Year Awards:** Kathleen Griffin, Carol Parks, Carol Groben

**Ten-Year Award:** Kerry Harris

**4000 Career Volunteer Hours:** Suzanne Wodek

**3000 Career Volunteer Hours:** Gail Banner

**2000 Career Volunteer Hours:** Kathleen Griffin

**1000 Career Volunteer Hours:** Lewis Applebaum, Barbara Hayes, Alan Wagner

### **100+ Hours Club:**

Ann Ammons, Nell Armstrong, Gail Banner, Carol Barley, Nan Dauphine, Myra Fuller, Kyle Gilgis, Debbie Green, Kathleen Griffin, Barbara Hayes, Beth Leonard, Marilyn Lonon, Patsy McNatt, Glenn Palmer, Donna Sapp, Mary Ann Snedeker, James Wade, Joyce Weinberg, Suzanne Wodek

### **Class of 2014:**

Portia Alexander, Gary Anderson, Martha Barnes-Nelson, Lorriane Cipriano, Elizabeth Devereaux, Laurie Frarey, Nancy Good, Judy Hamrick, Barbara Harrison, Ann Cary Hevener, Anita Metcalf, Janet Moore, Jill Prior, Diane Puckett, Hillary Siedler, Tish Szurek, Judy Testo, Sue Vogel

**New Sprout:** Martha Barnes-Nelson

## What's Happening in the Garden?

Check out [buncombemastergardener.org](http://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.

## Changes in Soil Sample Process During Peak Season

We are now in the season for soil sampling, and by now you may know that a “peak season soil test fee” has been implemented. This fee is \$4 per soil sample from November 26, 2014 to March 31, 2015. There are a few things to keep in mind that we've found to help make the process somewhat easier.

For homeowners who plan to submit 5 or fewer samples, prepayment of the peak-season soil fee is not necessary; however, you must pay for the samples before the soil report will be sent to you.

- 1) Take soil samples.
- 2) Fill out the paper soil information form. Make a copy or notes to know what samples came from where.
- 3) Pack the form in with soil boxes.
- 4) Mail samples and form. Do not include payment with the samples.

After the samples are analyzed and results are ready, an invoice will be sent to you via the postal service. To make Payment can be made over the phone (NCDA&CS Agronomic Division at (919) 733-2655) or by check (please include the invoice ID number on the check). Once payment is complete, you will receive an email with your soil report information.

If you plan to send more than 5 samples OR want to prepay online with a credit card, you need to create an account on the Agronomic Services website which is very similar to setting up an account with any other online “store”.

- 1) Take soil samples.
- 2) Enter your soil sample information into the online form (same information as the paper copy).
- 3) Make your credit card payment online.
- 4) Print off your form and pack it with your soil boxes.
- 5) Mail samples and printed form to Raleigh.

**It is important to print the form and include it with the samples.** At the present time, online credit card payment is only available for clients who do online data entry and prepayment of peak season fees.

To learn more about how to submit sample information and make online payments:  
Go to NCDA&CS Agronomic Services homepage directly: <http://www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/>

### **Questions and Answers About Soil Testing . . .**

We often hear these common questions from area gardeners – What is a soil test? Where can I get a soil test kit? How often should a soil be tested? Can I buy a pH meter to test my soil?

If you have any of these same questions, call the Extension office at 255-5522 or check out the Agronomic Services “Frequently Asked Questions about Soil Testing and Fertilizers” page at <http://www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/stfaqs.htm#q12>

### **WNC Beginner Bee School**

**March 14-15, 2015**

**Saturday 9:00 - 5:00**

**Sunday 12:00 - 4:15**

**The Folk Art Center, Milepost 382, Blue Ridge Parkway, Asheville, NC**

Thinking about bees? Planning to start beekeeping? Already have bees--and have questions? Open to all with an interest in bees, this two-day workshop will cover everything a prospective beekeeper needs to know. Learn about bees, biology and behavior, the equipment and setup of your apiary, costs, and the how to's of handling and managing your bees through the seasons.

**For more information and to register, go to:**  
The Center for Honeybee Research at [www.chbr.org](http://www.chbr.org)

### Plant of Interest – Italian Arum



Every winter I notice a small clump of variegated foliage nestled at the base of a lace cap hydrangea. It stands out since there are few other plants with evergreen foliage or any winter interest in the vicinity. What is this plant?

*Arum italicum*, commonly called Italian arum, is an herbaceous perennial woodland species native to Europe. It typically grows 12-18" tall and somewhat resembles our native Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*). For those familiar with this plant the varieties 'Marmoratum' and 'Pictum' over the years have been sold by many nurseries as separate plants; however, the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) currently lists these plants as being one and the same.

'Marmoratum' (now considered synonymous with 'Pictum') is a cultivar that features arrowhead-shaped, long-petioled, dark green to gray-green leaves (8-12" long) that are mottled, particularly along the veins, with light yellowish-green to creamy white variegation. Leaves emerge in fall, remain evergreen throughout the winter and die back or go dormant as temperatures warm up. The flowers bloom in spring and consist of (1) an erect, finger-like spadix covered with minute yellow flowers and (2) a large, sheath-like, light yellowish-green spathe (bract) which partially envelops the spadix like a hood. After bloom, the leaves and spathe die back leaving only the thick spadix that develops attractive, bright, orange-red berries in summer.

This little garden plant has no serious insect or disease problems and works great in the woodland garden and shaded border areas.

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**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](mailto:deanna_jordan@ncsu.edu).**

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