

# The Gardener's Dirt

Johnston County Center

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## Feature

### Apple App of the Month

By Karen Damari

One of the more important tools in a gardener's arsenal is a journal. A garden journal is not to chronicle the past for posterity, but to improve each subsequent year's gardens by recording (and reviewing) previous successes and failures. Bloom dates, planting dates, varieties planted, fertilizer dates, harvest dates, pest identification dates, rainfall, frost, disease, crop rotation, what have I done in the past, what do I need to do in the future – the amount of information you choose to keep can be basic or detailed, unchanging or evolving. However, any information retained will help improve your gardening from year to year.

I happen to use **Calendar**, **Voice Memos** and **Camera** to assist in my journaling (which nicely syncs an iPhone with an iPad and Macbook so the same data appears on all 3 devices, no matter where the entry was made). All these apps came with the iPhone 4S, so there was no initial cost to starting the journal (well... other than the cost of the phone, which I was getting anyway).

Taking the iPhone out with me as I tour the gardens, I take pictures of insects chomping on plants that I need to identify. If I see seedlings coming up, I can quick-look at **Calendar** to see when they were sown and then make a voice memo, "Hey, the lettuce is coming up and it's only been 3 days!" I can see that, despite it being a beautiful Spring day, previous years' frost dates haven't hit yet so I can't plant the tomatoes, despite my burning desire to do so.

To record my observations, I created a specific calendar in **Calendar** called Gardening. By unchecking all the other calendars, I can view only my Garden Journal. The journal consists of short-worded entries as all-day, free time events, just enough for visual identification, with Notes to elaborate on the entry. I can attach pictures so that next year, when I've forgotten the insect I took a picture of last year and it is again chomping on my plants, I can quickly scroll to last year's entry and bring up the picture to confirm it is indeed the

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same pest and what I did about it. I've even taken pictures of seed packets to attach to a planting entry, identifying the variety planted. I particularly like making future entries with alarms to remind me to do a thing. Fertilizing schedules would be forgotten (until too late when the plant is showing signs of nutritional distress) if I didn't have future entries in **Calendar**. And, since I look at **Calendar** every day, I am consistently reviewing what I've done and what I need to do.

January is a great time to start your Garden Journal. Why not consider doing it in **Calendar**?

## FEATURE PLANT

### Hydrangae spp.

By Deborah M. Crandall

There are certain classic native plants that just have a natural harmony with gardening in the South: magnolias, azaleas, camellias, and, definitely hydrangeas are among these favorites. When most gardeners hear the word hydrangea, they think of the large pink or blue puffball blooms. But hydrangeas come in a range of shapes, sizes and varieties. Knowing which will do best under your garden conditions is the first step to success with this beautiful summer bloomer. Two different flower types are present on most Hydrangeas-fertile and sterile. Fertile flowers are small, and- usually found near the center of a cluster surrounded by sterile flowers. Sterile flowers are large and showy.

Hydrangeas need about one inch of water a week, but during hot, dry weather, they may require up to 2 inches of water per week to keep from wilting. Most species can be grown in either full sun or partial shade. They have

few insect pests or diseases. Pruning hydrangea shrubs varies by variety, as some flower on old wood and some on new, and others on both.

The most popular species is ***Hydrangea macrophylla***, which is known as Bigleaf, French, garden or florist's hydrangea. It produces those large puffball blooms of blue, pink or white flowers in early summer. During cold winters it may die back to the ground and it is late to leaf out in spring.



Bigleaf hydrangeas have two types of flower heads. The Mophead (Hortensia) group which look like large globes and the Lacecap group which has flowers in a flat-topped cluster. Bigleaf hydrangeas are generally hardy to zone 6.

Mophead and many lacecap hydrangea blooms are sensitive to soil pH. In acidic soils (pH 5.5 and lower), flowers tend to blue. In neutral to alkaline soils (pH 6.5 and higher) blooms tend toward pink. Between pH 5.5 and pH 6.5, the flowers may be purple or a mixture of blue and pink flowers will be found on the same plant. So if you want to change the color of your hydrangea blooms, add sulfur to make them more blue and lime to make them more pink.

Most Bigleaf hydrangeas flower on old wood (it grew last year) which means the flower buds have to go through the winter. These buds have a low survival rate in colder

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climates and an early or late freeze may also damage them. This is the main reason hydrangeas fail to bloom.

Of all the hydrangea species, **Panicle hydrangea (*H. paniculata*)** is the most adaptable. It is more tolerant of dry spells and full sun and is the hardiest of the species as it can be grown in zones 4 to 7. It grows 10 to 15 feet tall. It produces creamy white, 6 to 18-inch long panicles which bloom in mid-summer. Flowers may turn pink as they mature. Panicle hydrangeas bloom on new wood, so prune in late winter or early spring if needed.

***Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight'** is unique because its cone-shape flowers open a lovely shade of chartreuse then fade to rich pink in fall. 'Pinky Winky' bears large cone shaped flowers that start white and turn to pink at the



base come fall. The strong stems hold the flowers up, even in heavy rains.

**Smooth hydrangea (*H. arborescens*)** is native to the eastern U.S. where it grows as a woodland under-story shrub. It prefers part shade and plenty of moisture and grows as a rounded shrub 3 to 5 feet high and wide. It blooms in late June to early July, producing white flowers in clusters 4 to 6 inches in diameter. 'Annabelle' is a popular cultivar that has large flower heads, up to 12 inches across.

'White Dome' has an open, lace cap flower head that holds up well in heavy rain. Hardy to zone 4, it may die back to the ground in the winter, but will still bloom the following year as it forms its flower buds on new wood. Prune it in late winter or early spring before new growth appears.

**Oakleaf hydrangea (*H. quercifolia*)** is native to the southeastern U.S. Its large, lobed leaves resemble oak leaves. Oakleaf hydrangea grows with upright stems, reaching a height of 8 feet. It blooms in July, when the large, white conical flower heads appear. The flowers dry



to a pink-mauve as they age and remain attractive in to the fall. The foliage can be spectacular in autumn, changing to shades of crimson, burgundy and purple. Oakleaf hydrangea is hardy to zone 5.

Hydrangea flowers can be easily dried for flower arrangements and even made into wreaths. Whether used in the shrub border, with perennials, or as a specimen shrub, hydrangeas provide color and beauty throughout the summer and into the fall. Hydrangea can provide years of enjoyment for everyone, from beginners to experience gardeners.

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## Happy Gardening in 2014!

### References:

Hydrangea HGIC 1067- <http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/plants/landscape/shrubs/hgic1067.html>

Hydrangea Selections- <http://www.bhg.com/gardening/plant-dictionary/shrub/hydrangea/>

How to Prune Hydrangeas: January 2013: <http://www.trianglegardener.com/main/gardening-101/how-to-prune-hydrangeas/>

Hydrangeas! Hydrangeas! <http://www.hydrangeashydrangeas.com>

### For more information:

American Hydrangea Society (AHS): <http://www.americanhydrangeasociety.org>

All About Hydrangeas: <http://www.Hydrangeasplus.com>

Hydrangea: Essential Southern Plant - <http://www.southernliving.com/home-garden/gardens/hydrangea-planting-tips-00417000067429/>

Hydrangea Care Video- by Millie Davenport, Clemson University, 2007- [http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/videos\\_posters/videos/hydrangeas.html](http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/videos_posters/videos/hydrangeas.html)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

**training** - A new class will begin on Thursday, January 16 at 1:30pm. If you are interested in becoming an Extension Master Gardener Volunteer in Johnston County, you need to get an application and turn it into Shawn Banks at the Johnston County office of North Carolina Cooperative Extension. The class will meet once a week on Thursday afternoons beginning January 16 and continuing through Thursday, April 24, 2014. The class will cost \$100. To get an application you can send an email to [Shawn\\_Banks@ncsu.edu](mailto:Shawn_Banks@ncsu.edu) or call 919 989-5380.

### Fruit Tree Training and Pruning Workshop

- Saturday, January 25 at 10:00 we will meet in the orchard at [Central Crops Research Station](#) in Clayton where we will be pleased to have Dr. Mike Parker, Tree Fruit Specialist, from NC State University talk to us about training fruit trees and do a demonstration on a couple trees in the orchard. Please call 919 989-5380 to register for this workshop.

### Blueberry Production and Pruning

**Workshop** - Saturday, March 8, 2014 at 9:00am we will meet at the Johnston County Agriculture Building in Smithfield where we will be pleased to have Dr. Bill Cline, Blueberry Pathology Specialist, from NC State University talk to us about blueberry production in eastern North Carolina. After Dr. Cline talks to us about production we will go to a blueberry field about a mile from the building and have a demonstration on pruning blueberries. Please call 919 989-5380 to register for this workshop.

**Beginning Beekeeping Class** - Will begin on Wednesday, February 5, 2014 and run through March 26, 2014. The class will meet on Wednesday nights each week from 6:00pm

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until 9:00pm. If you are interested in keeping bees, this is the class for you. The cost of the class is \$50.00. If you are interested in taking this class, call 919 989-5380 or email [Amie\\_Newsome@ncsu.edu](mailto:Amie_Newsome@ncsu.edu)

### **Shiitake Mushroom Production Workshop**

- We be held Thursday, February 27, 2014 at the Johnston County Livestock Arena, 520 County Home Road, Smithfield. This workshop will begin at 9:00am and finish up at 3:00pm in the afternoon. There is a \$20 charge for materials and supplies, plus you will need to bring 2 to 4 logs to inoculate. For more information about this workshop call 919 989-5380 or email

[Amie\\_Newsome@ncsu.edu](mailto:Amie_Newsome@ncsu.edu).

For accommodations for persons with disabilities, contact Bryant Spivey at 919-989-5380 no later than Five business days before the event.

## **YARD VILLAIN**

### **Common Chickweed**

#### ***Stellaria media***

By Vicki Shore

Chances are that low growing, light green or yellow green succulent you are seeing in your yard or flower bed is common chickweed. Chickweed grows vigorously in cooler weather. It prefers shady, moist locations with rich soil, but this European native grows from the Arctic Circle to higher altitudes near the equator.

A broadleaf annual, chickweed is a member of the pink or carnation family, Caryophyllaceae. Stems grow 3 to 15 inches, are widely branched, and grow in a thick springy mat. Along the stem grows a single line of white hairs. The leaf surfaces are smooth and

arranged in opposite pairs. At night each pair of leaves closes up around the stem.

Midwinter the chickweed produces white flowers. Each plant produces 2500 to 15,000 seeds. The seeds can ripen 5 to 7 weeks after the parent plant germinates. Seeds remain viable in the soil for up to 10 years.

Mouse-ear chickweed is similar to the common chickweed; however mouse-ear is a perennial with darker leaves that are elongated rather than round. The leaves are also covered with soft white hairs.

Early Europeans used chickweed for food. It is still an important food source for wildlife, particularly birds, and is a favorite of chickens. Scandinavian orchardists believe it brings higher yield and quality to fruit when grown as a ground cover under their fruit trees. Chickweed is also grown to halt erosion in the Rhine Valley area of Germany. Medicinal uses have included making a tea to be used as eye drops, a tonic for GI ailments, and a poultice for skin conditions.

Most of us would rather eradicate chickweed than to encourage it. Better yet, let's prevent it. Prevention involves keeping healthy lawns, mulching flower beds or using a pre-emergent. When it does creep into our landscape, use a product containing 2,4-D or glyphosate. As always when using chemical controls, follow the directions on the label.

#### References:

Southern Living Garden Problem Solver

Penn State Extension, [www://extension.psu.edu/pests/weeds/weed-id/commonchickweed](http://www://extension.psu.edu/pests/weeds/weed-id/commonchickweed)

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# WHAT'S IN SEASON

## Mâche

*Valerianella locusta*

By Tina Stricklen

The first time I saw mâche was during a winter time home and garden show a few years ago. A local vendor was selling small pots of a plant she called lamb's lettuce. It was curious, I mean, why would you grow lettuce specifically to feed your flock? I thought, "What people won't do to pamper their livestock."

It turns out that assumption is not that far off the mark. This hardy European salad green first appeared during the Renaissance period where it grew wild in corn and wheat fields. Peasant people and livestock alike foraged it. Later, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, it began to be cultivated in the Nantes region of France and the rest, as they say, is history.

What makes this vegetable stand out from the myriad choices in the salad crop field is the fact that these plants are very cold hardy. Where so many tender greens fail during the coldest months of the year, mâche is a rock star.

The ground-hugging, rosette-forming, vibrant green plants are characteristically slow to grow. For this reason, it is suggested that you plant seeds in succession to produce enough to carry you through the winter. The leaves have a delicate, slightly nutty flavor with a succulent



texture. This salad green is excellent simply dressed but can stand up to braising in soups and sauces. It is also a favorite in green smoothies for those who appreciate its nutritional value. Refer to the table below for some other interesting fast facts.

Mâche - A quick reference chart:	
<b>Nutritional Values</b>	Excellent source of Omega 3, Vitamins A and C, Iron, Folic Acid & Zinc Only 20 calories per three ounce serving Good source of fiber, potassium and calcium
<b>Growing Instructions</b>	Plant anytime soil temperature is between 41-68° F Sow 1" apart in rows 4" – 18" apart Germinates slowly in 10 -14 days
<b>Other common names</b>	Corn salad, lamb's lettuce, lamb's tongue, field lettuce, field salad, fetticus, & Little Sweet One

As the salad green craze continues to heat up, could mâche be the next big thing? It may not supplant kale any time soon but in my kitchen garden it holds a leading role between December and February. I would venture to bet you have a new seed catalogue nearby - why not add mâche seed to that order you are putting together for 2014? With its exceptional nutritional values and ease of cultivation, it's worth giving it a go.

### Resources:

<http://www.johnnyseeds.com/>

<http://www.healwithfood.org/health-benefits/mache-lettuce-nutrition.php>

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<http://www.fondation-louisbonduelle.org/france/en/know-your-vegetables/nutritional-assets-of-vegetables/mache.html#axzz2p4KdP2Vi>

# JANUARY GARDEN TASKS

## LANDSCAPE AREAS

- Plants less than one year old may need some supplemental water to get through the winter.
- Watering well just before a cold snap helps plants survive bitter temperatures.
- Plants with scale insects or spider mite infestations can be treated now with horticultural oil products.
- Some evergreen shrubs like boxwood, gardenia, and Nandina can be pruned now. To reduce camellia petal blight collect the fallen flower petals and put them in the compost pile.
- Perennials like daylily, Shasta daisy, and peony can be divided when the ground is dry enough to be worked.
- When searching through seed catalogs look for key phrases like “heat tolerant” and “tolerates humidity”.



## EDIBLES

- Prepare the vegetable garden for planting in February by removing weeds and adding compost.

- If you haven't already, look through seed catalogs for vegetable varieties that aren't easy to find in our area.
- Consider starting some cool season crop seeds in a cold frame to get a jump on the season.
- Mulch strawberry beds with 2-3 inches of wheat straw for winter protection. Remove mulch in spring when blooms appear.
- Asparagus crowns can be planted though March. New plants should not be harvested for 2-3 years.
- Prune fruit trees now through March or when the buds begin to break.



## HOUSEPLANTS

- Check holiday gift plants for insects before placing them near other plants. Let houseplants rest. Most houseplants are semi-dormant during short days. Save the fertilizer for when they begin to grow in spring.
- Inspect plants that were moved inside for the winter for insects that may have hitched a ride. Treat any found with insecticidal soap.
- Check any bulbs that were dug and stored for the winter for signs of soft rot. Discard any that have become soft and add fresh sawdust. Bulbs that are wrinkled may be too dry mist them with water to prevent dehydration.



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