

# The Gardener's Dirt

Johnston County Center

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## Feature Article

### Sleep, Creep, Leap

Tina Stricklen, Master Gardener

#### Inside This Issue

Feature Article.....	1
Feature Plant.....	3
Incredible Edible.....	4
Ask an Expert .....	5
Quick Tip .....	6
Garden Tasks.....	7
Cool Connections....	8
Upcoming Events....	8

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Sleep, Creep, Leap may sound like the latest dance craze but it's actually one of the first lessons we learn as gardeners. This simple catch phrase describes the growth rates of perennials such as trees, shrubs, vines and groundcovers. So the saying goes, "The first year they sleep, the second year they creep, and the third year they leap."

#### Year 1 – Sleep

Whether you start them from seed, bare roots or container-grown, perennials initially planted out in the garden will go through a transition period. This period is known as transplant shock but it can be less burdensome on the plant depending



on the season. In many cases, the ideal time to start a garden in our area is spring. These plants should be allowed sufficient time to establish themselves before flowering or before the onset of cold or hot weather. Some plants prefer fall planting in order to develop an extensive root system before new foliage can begin.

#### Year 2 – Creep

The year following planting may find some gardeners scratching their head and wondering why on earth they spent so much effort for so little output. The truth of the matter is these perennials are developing deeper roots and becoming further established perhaps even showing more foliage from the previous year. Mulching and fertilization is important to keep weeds at bay while maintaining moisture around the roots. Fertilizing at the proper times, depending on the plant, will ensure success in the coming seasons.

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### Year 3 - Leap

If the plant has not had to compete for nutrients or against poor drainage or attacks from pests such as voles or squirrels, and if they have had ample sunlight and no other disease has attacked them, you can expect to see your plants grow with vim and vigor. If your plants are happy, they will show it. During the growing season, the plant will begin to flush out with more vegetative growth, roots will continue to grow and depending on the plant, more flowers will appear. The following photos are examples of a mature landscape. The first photo representing Year 1 – Sleep shows the garden soon after it was planted in 2009 and the second photo representing Year 3 – Leap was taken in late spring 2014.

Remember that not all your plants will strictly follow this schedule as some can take more or less time to establish. This formula is a general rule of thumb.

Given the Year 3/Leap scenario, the most important take away here is plant placement. **Understanding the mature size of a plant is key.** For if you place a 6-foot-wide plant in a 3-foot-wide space, you will be sorely reminded every time you have to prune. It may have looked good in the first couple of years, but now it has outgrown that spot and you're faced with the ongoing chore of pruning or even worse, having to move the plant all together.



While you are waiting for your garden to “leap”, you can use annuals to effectively fill the gaps. Annuals put on a lot of growth as well as flowers in a single season. I used this trick when I first developed a sun garden off my back deck. Using a plant called Spider Flower (*Cleome hassleriana*), I found it offered a lot of color and interest in the interim period of my garden. In fact, now that it has matured, I pot up most of the volunteers that self-seed, leaving only a few back as accents in the garden.

There are many go-to annuals that can be used to fill the gaps including: Coleus, Marigolds, Zinnias, Penta, Begonias, Impatiens, Strawflower, Dusty Miller, Pansies, Vinca, Petunias, Delosperma

Here is a list of choice herbaceous perennials that you can try in your garden:

Coneflower, Baptisia, Gaura, Helleborus, Yarrow, Gaillardia, Heuchera, Rudbeckia, Salvia, Canna, Yucca, Daylily

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These lists are only a starting point but hopefully you will have some fun and exciting plants and garden ideas you plan to tackle in the coming year. Happy gardening in 2016!

**Sources:**

<http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/homegardening/scene5a2d.html>

<http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/plants/landscape/flowers/hgic1153.html>

## FEATURE PLANT

### “Choice Plants” Series

Marshall Warren – Horticulture Extension Agent

“**Choice Plants**” was the brainchild of Landis Hall, owner of Carroll’s Plant Center in Benson. He felt that something was needed to help stimulate the Johnston County Nursery industry. The idea came to him in 2011 and with the help of Richard Currin and Ruth C. Holcomb of Currin’s Nursery in Willow Spring, Alan Erwin of Panther Creek Nursery in Willow Spring, and Jeff Allegood of Old Courthouse Nursery in Warsaw, the idea was refined and pursued.



In addition to helping the Johnston County Nursery industry it also became a fundraiser for the JC Raulston Arboretum. Colorful description tags of each new “**Choice Plants**” selection is purchased by the nurserymen for \$1.00. Fifty cent (\$0.50) of the cost is to pay for the tag and fifty cents (\$0.50) is donated to the JC Raulston Arboretum. “**Choice Plants**” is a collaborative effort between the Johnston County Nursery Marketing Association (JCNMA) and the JC Raulston Arboretum.

As the “**Choice Plants**” idea began to grow, it was decided to get the help and input of other professionals in the horticultural industry. A committee was formed that

currently meets twice a year and consists of members of the JCNMA, wholesale plant propagators, landscapers, retail garden center owners and professional horticulturalists from NCSU. They are currently looking for a Landscape Architect to round out the committee. The driving force of the committee is not necessarily new plants but good plants that are not yet available in commercial production. “**Choice Plants**” are superior selections of new and underused plants for the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic from the JC Raulston Arboretum landscape trials. The plants are chosen for their adaptability, beauty, and overall garden worth. This doesn’t just happen overnight, it takes many years for the evaluation process, propagation, and growing to reach a sizeable plant that is ready for sale to the public. In 2016, there are a few “**Choice Plants**” that are ready for sale to the public.

Richard Currin says, “*We have the most exciting group of plants coming in 2016 that will be in production for a long time and the garden centers are drooling over them*”.

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A new Featured “**Choice Plants**” will be described and promoted in this newsletter every other month until there are no more selections available. When another one is ready for sale to the public, then it will be introduced.

<http://jocoplants.com/>

<https://jcra.ncsu.edu/>



I was fortunate to have JC Raulston as one of my professors at NCSU. He instilled a love of plants in me that will be with me all my life.

The JC Raulston Arboretum is a nationally acclaimed garden with one of the largest and most diverse collections of landscape plants adapted for landscape use in the Southeast. Plants especially adapted to Piedmont North Carolina conditions are collected and evaluated in an effort to find superior plants for use in southern landscapes.

## Incredible Edible

### Planting Pecan Trees

Marshall Warren, Horticulture Extension Agent

I remember as a child helping rake leaves and picking up the pecans in my grandmother's yard. I was so excited when I had enough strength to be able to take two pecans in my hand and crack them open to get to the tasty nut. The piles of leaves would be burned and I enjoyed hearing the popping sounds of the stray pecans. Sometimes I would throw a couple in the fire just to hear them pop. I miss those carefree days and maybe you do too. It's never too late to plant and grow your own pecan trees.

It's best to purchase a commercial variety, about 4 to 6 feet tall, that has been grafted onto a seedling rootstock. Plant the trees with a minimum spacing of 70' in late Fall or early winter. Pecan varieties are grouped into two types. Type 1 varieties are Cape Fear and Pawnee and Type 2 varieties are Stuart, Forkert, Chickasaw, Elliott, Sumner, Kiowa and Gloria Grande. For pollination to occur you must plant at least one variety from each type.

Pecan scab, a major disease, is best managed by first selecting resistant varieties. Elliott, Gloria Grande, and Sumner are varieties that are the most scab resistant while Stuart, being the most common variety is

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moderately resistant. The planting hole should be deep and wide enough to prevent curling of the roots. Plant the tree so that the graft union is 2 inches above the soil surface.

After planting, cut back the top vegetative portion of the tree approximately one-third to maintain balance with the root system. Pecan trees should be trained to a central leader system with the lateral branches spiraling up the main leader every 8 to 16 inches. Pecans are different from most fruit trees in that they have at least three buds at each node. The orientation of the branches from these nodes is very different and is used for tree training. Just before the buds begin to grow in the spring, buds can be selected to train the tree to a central leader form. The primary bud is the top bud and produces a very upright branch, which should be the central leader. All other primary buds should be removed by rubbing them off just before bud break. Secondary and tertiary buds can be used for training the lateral branches. As the tree matures it will be necessary to remove branches to prevent crowding and allow light penetration.

Growing pecans requires patience and a long term commitment, but will produce nuts for decades with minimal effort and expense.

See links below for more detailed pruning information and diagrams as well as long term care needs.

**Sources:**

<http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/training-and-pruning-fruit-trees-in-north-carolina>

<https://forsyth.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Tree-Fruits-Contents.pdf?fwd=no>

**Pecan Recipe:** Take two pecans, place firmly in your hand, squeeze, crack and enjoy!



## Ask an Expert

by Ruth C. Holcomb  
Currin's Nursery

***"What are some good plant choices to use in a foundation planting that would not die when a dog pees on it?"***

There are not many plants that won't die or be damaged if a dog chooses it as its favorite pee spot. Once the acidic urine hits the plant over and over, the plant will get damaged no matter the kind of plant. However, there are plants that are damaged more easily, such as boxwoods and gardenias. In my experience with my own dog, many of the hollies available will hold up better than boxwoods such as Dwarf Yaupon Holly, Compacta Holly, and Hoogendorn Holly. Both Helleri Holly and Soft Touch Holly have been damaged by my dog. Also, some of the Nandina cultivars seem to hold up well to dog urine such as Gulfstream, Harbour Dwarf, and Royal Princess.

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## ***"What is your favorite plant and why?"***

My favorite plant is currently "Woodlander's Ruby" Illicium (common name of Anise). It has nice deep green lustrous leaves and a ruby colored strap-like flower in the spring and summer. With its long narrow leaves, it looks tropical. It can stand deep shade and I have heard it can grow in full sun, though I have no experience with that. Customers say that deer pass over it. At my own house (just planted this past September), it has so far held up very well in a half-sun half-shade situation. At the nursery, it's grown in dappled pine shade and has been low maintenance in our 3 years' experience growing it.

# **Quick Tip**

## **How to Make your Wheelbarrow Last Virtually Forever**

*(Note: Only for serious gardeners and landscapers)*

Marshall Warren, Horticulture Extension Agent

When I had my landscaping business, my employees and I would destroy a new wheelbarrow every few months by overloading it with topsoil, rock, boulders, brick, and large B&B trees. Under these heavy loads, the wheelbarrows would eventually buckle and break.

I got tired of replacing these costly wheelbarrows so I thought of a great solution to prevent this from happening again. The problem was that the bottom of the tub portion of the wheelbarrow needed to be better supported. The next time I purchased a wheelbarrow I also purchased a piece of Severe Weather Pine Pressure Treated Plywood about 1/2 inch thick. *(Note: don't buy one of those sissy wheelbarrows, get a good quality substantial one.)* Outline and cut a section of the plywood to totally fit under the tub portion - mark and drill holes for the bolts - insert the plywood between the tub and the rails and bolt them together firmly.

Now make the sound like Tim Taylor did on the TV show Home Improvement!



My 18-year-old wheelbarrow  
Photo by Marshall Warren



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# JANUARY GARDEN TASKS

## LANDSCAPE IDEAS

- 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 daylilies, 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 through March. New plants should not be harvested for 2-3 years.
- Prune fruit trees now through March or when the buds begin to break.

## Changes for the 2016 Gardener’s Dirt Newsletter

Brenda Clayton, Master Gardener/Editor

Thank you so much for subscribing to the Johnston County ***Gardener’s Dirt Newsletter*** written by our Master Gardener volunteers with lots of help from our Extension Agent.

We are proposing several changes for 2016 that we trust you will like! Some sections will remain the same. For example, the Feature Article, Quick Tip, Cool Connections, and Garden Tasks will be in each monthly issue.

Here are several major changes:

Every other month we plan to rotate particular articles.

- The Feature Plant will rotate with Be Creative-Grow Native.
- A Veggie Tale (formerly Incredible Edible) will rotate with Good or Bad.
- **All new:** Ask a Local Expert will rotate with NC Gardens.

We hope you will like our new ideas. You will certainly be exposed to a wider array of gardening information. Each month will be different from the month before so we hope that will peak your interest and readership.

Give it a couple of months and then let us know your thoughts. Please email our Extension Agent, Marshall Warren at [mhwarren@ncsu.edu](mailto:mhwarren@ncsu.edu)

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## COOL CONNECTIONS

[NC Extension Gardener Manual](#)

[NCSU Publication Links](#)

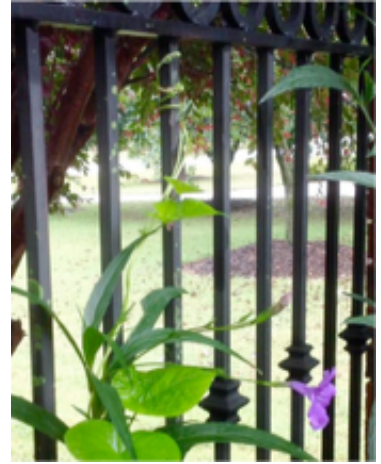
[NC Extension Gardening Portal](#)

[NC Extension Plant Database](#)

[Going Native \(Selecting and Planting Native Plants\)](#)

[NCSU Pruning Trees and Shrubs](#)

[Past Issues of Gardeners Dirt](#)



## Upcoming Events

### **Become a Johnston Co Extension Master Gardener!**

Calling for men and women who love to garden, would like to learn and share their knowledge, serve as a volunteer and have fun with other gardening enthusiasts! To learn more about Master Gardeners, go to <http://www.ncstategardening.org/>

The training starts on Thursday January 28th, 2016. Classes will be held each Thursday afternoon from 1:30 to 4:30 for 13 weeks. Contact Marshall H. Warren for more information. Email him at [http://mhwarren@ncsu.edu](mailto:mhwarren@ncsu.edu) or call 919-989-5380. [Click here](#) to access the application. There will be a course fee of \$120 that will include an educational Training Manual and name tag. Please make check payable to Johnston County Ag Center. The application and check are due by January 20th, 2016. Mail to 2736 NC 210 Highway, Smithfield NC 27577.

### **Fruit and Nut Tree Pruning Demonstration**

Are you interested in learning more about pruning your fruit or nut trees? If so, Dr. Mike Parker, Fruit and Nut tree specialist at NCSU will be holding a Fruit and Nut tree pruning demonstration open to the public at the Central Crops Research Station, 13223 US Business 70 W, Clayton NC 27520

Date – January 30<sup>th</sup> 2016 at 10:00 a.m. There will be time to answer questions on insect and disease control as well as pruning questions. This event will be held outside so be sure to dress accordingly.

For questions regarding this event or location please call the Johnston County Cooperative Extension Service at 919-989-5380 or email [bkparker@ncsu.edu](mailto:bkparker@ncsu.edu)

NEWSLETTER EDITED BY: Brenda Clayton

\*\*\* If you would like to receive this newsletter monthly via email, send an email to [angie\\_faison@ncsu.edu](mailto:angie_faison@ncsu.edu) asking to be added to “The Gardener’s Dirt” email list.

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