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Feature Article, Be Creative Grow Native, Featured Plant -"Choice Plants" Selection, Visiting Great NC Gardens, Quick Tip, Monthly Garden Tasks, Cool Connections, Upcoming Events



# The Gardener's Dirt

Johnston County Cooperative Extension

December 2016

## Feature Article

### Night-Scaping - Enjoy and Highlight your Landscape During the Evening Hours

Marshall Warren, Extension Agent Commercial and Consumer Horticulture

Countless hours and dollars are spent developing your landscape garden; and, yet, you only enjoy it during the day. Don't let your hard work go unnoticed at nightfall. Instead, create interest and highlight your landscape during the evening, too, with outdoor lighting to enhance the beauty of your landscape while providing safety and security as well. With some imagination and experimentation, the possibilities are endless...

With landscape lighting, it's sometimes hard to know what to do or where to start. Most landscape lighting today is low voltage and is the best choice for most homeowners. Unlike 120-volt systems, low voltage is safer, easier to work with, and less costly to install. Basically, landscape lighting systems consists of a transformer that reduces your 120-volt household current to a safer 12 volts, a timer, lighting fixtures, bulbs, and cable. With the development of LEDs, you will get more light with less wattage and the bulbs last much longer than traditional bulbs. Design your system and calculate how many watts will be used. This information will help you determine the length, size/gauge of cable and how large a transformer you'll need.

When lighting pathways, don't outline the walkway like an airplane runway. Using fewer path lights is better. Instead lead with gentle hints of where to go next. Always illuminate obstacles such as steps or a change in the paving surface. Another approach to path lighting is to forego path lights and utilize Down-lighting from overhead trees, or use indirect light from up-lit trees and shrub or a combination of these methods.



Photo Courtesy of JC Raulston Arboretum



Consider the art of silhouette - the effect of a black object against a white background - by placing a wash of light between an object and a wall. Objects with special architectural features like plant material, a sculpture or a fountain are good candidates to silhouette. Or, allow these objects to pop out and be the center of attention by carefully placing narrow spot lights to highlight their unique features.

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Photo Courtesy of  
JC Raulston Arboretum

Up-lighting trees, shrubs and architectural structures is done by placing a spotlight at the base and underneath and shining directly up and into their canopy. This will show off their shape and trunk structure. This up-lighting technique creates a dramatic effect. If you want a different effect, down-lighting these features will give a more subtle and natural look. Using a combination of these lighting techniques can also be beneficial.

When lights are placed high in trees (20-40'), the effect is called moonlighting. This subtle lighting creates light and shadowy effects on the ground and becomes more pronounced when there is movement from a slight breeze. Remember, in many cases, you may want to see the effect of the light and not see the direct light source. Light shining directly in your eye is too harsh. Also, keep in mind, you don't need to light every inch of your landscape. Often, less is more. Creating shadows can be just as interesting as light. Correct placement of lighting fixtures can create shadows of trees, shrubs, art objects and highlight textures of stone and other objects. The play of light and darkness can be quite intriguing.

If you want a good outdoor lighting system with creative lighting effects, I would avoid inexpensive solar light fixtures. To design a pleasing night-scaping scheme, it is more about artistry than just installing a prepackaged landscape lighting kit. There are many other lighting design techniques you will want to explore. To get an idea of what night-scaping might look like in your yard, explore after dark, using an ordinary light placed inside a hollow metal can or a flashlight and go around your property. Experiment and try to create the effects that have been discussed. For small projects, you may want to install it yourself, but for more complicated and sophisticated designs, you should hire a professional landscape lighting company.

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## Be Creative, Grow Native

### Holiday Décor - The Natural Way

Eloise Adams, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Holiday traditions are vast and varied. However, using fresh greenery to decorate the home during this festive season is one tradition many of us share. Fortunately, we have a profusion of evergreens from which to choose and many options for using them.

Wreaths, swags, centerpieces or garlands are what most of us use to decorate our homes, and, "Oh yes!", don't forget the mailbox. That is generally the first thing you see when visiting someone's home. Simple or elaborate - it is your choice. With some of the abundant greenery there is a bonus of berries or seed pods. A prime example of a berried plant is the Heavenly Bamboo (Nandina). If you would like the berries to have a somewhat shiny appearance you can dip them in clear floor wax. They are long-lived, holding their color well. Unfortunately, the leaves of the Nandina do

not last. *Tsuga canadensis* (Canadian Hemlock) and *Pinus taeda* (Loblolly Pine) are just two of the cone bearing greenery you can use.

All greenery should be conditioned before use. By that, I mean cut the branches on an angle and place them in a container of warm water to let them "drink" for a few hours. It will increase their longevity.



Wreaths are surely one of the favorites. You can purchase a metal form with clamps to hold the greenery stationary, use a grapevine wreath as a base which holds the greenery in place or purchase a ring-shaped oasis which makes your wreath last much longer. One of the most popular greens for wreaths is the *Abies frasier* (Fraser Fir), which of course doesn't grow well in this zone. Most tree sale vendors, who put the tree in a stand, will give you the branches they cut from the bottom. Other choices are *Buxus microphylla* (Little Leaf Boxwood), the Southern favorite, *Magnolia Grandiflora* (Southern Magnolia) and the variety 'Little Gem' which has smaller leaves. There is no limit to what you can use - it's a personal preference. Few things welcome the Christmas season better than a wreath.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) is the queen of the crop when adding herbs to your arrangements. It is long lasting, especially in centerpieces, and aromatic. Just give it a brush with your hand to release that wonderful aroma. It is known as a symbol of remembrance and love.

As I said at the beginning - simple or elaborate - the choice is yours. My favorite simple arrangement is to take an arm load of mixed greenery, a few twigs of *Salix matsudana* 'Tortuosa' (Curly Willow) and *Ulmus alata* (Winged Elm) and put them in a festive container of water. Sometimes I spray paint the twigs red. Happy decorating!

## Feature Plant - "Choice Plants" Selection

### Kay's Early Hope Redbud

*Cercis chinensis* 'Kay's Early Hope'

#### A JC Raulston Arboretum & Johnston County Nursery Marketing Association Introduction

Few plants brighten the early spring garden quite like redbuds. Our own woodlands come alive with the lavender flowers of *Cercis canadensis* before almost any other blooming native tree and the same can be said for the West Coast, Mexico, and southern Europe all of whom have their own native species of redbud. Asia is blessed with quite a few different species but the most commonly found is *C. chinensis*.

The Chinese redbud is a small tree or large shrub, almost invariably either multi-stemmed or branching low to the ground and growing to about 12'-15' tall. In cultivation, it is sometimes grown as a single trunked tree which will still typically only grow to around 15' or so tall with a distinct vase-like, upright branching structure. In the wilds of central China, there are reports of trees growing to 50' tall but will never be that tall in cultivation.

In 1996, the JCRA received seed from the University of Nebraska that had been wild-collected in Hubei province in China. By 1997, it had grown to 1' tall and was soon planted out on the grounds. Staff thought highly enough of this plant to transplant it in 2000 to make way for the construction of the Ruby C. McSwain Education Center. In its new location, it continued to shine and was given the name 'Kay's Early Hope' in early 2009.

This lovely small tree is distinguished by its exceptionally long bloom period. It is generally among the first of the JCRA's redbuds to flower and continuing until well after the leaves emerge for a display from March until the end of April. The sheer volume of flowers from near the tips of the branches down to the oldest trunks makes an exceptional display of pink-lavender over an extended period. Following the flowers are lovely, heart-shaped leaves which hold up well under the high heat and humidity of the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic.





'Kay's Early Hope' grows exceptionally well from full sun to part shade in average garden soil. It rarely needs pruning except to help shape young plants or to remove the occasional crossing branch. Pruning, when necessary, can be performed shortly after flowering. It is hardy to zone 6. This redbud which is always in flower in plenty of time for the March basketball tournament was named for NC State's incomparable women's basketball coach, Kay Yow. Kay's grace under pressure, elegance, and tough constitution are well represented by this tree and the pinkish-lavender flowers remind us of her determination not to give up in her fight with cancer. 'Kay's Early Hope' redbud is the perfect garden reminder that spring is just around the corner and winter is soon over.

## Visiting Great NC Gardens

### The Meadow Lights

Annette Byrd, Extension Master Garden Volunteer

"Oh its beginning to look a lot like Christmas!" or so the song goes... and nowhere is that more true than at Meadow Lights located at 4546 Godwin Lake Road in Benson!

Starting on November 18th and running through New Years, you can enjoy the true spirit of the holidays at Meadow Christmas Lights! You say you've never been there??? Well, let me tell you all about it!

It all started about 40 years ago when Roy Johnson of the Meadow community in Johnston County started decorating with a few lights in the yard, mostly for the enjoyment of his family and children. Soon, others started to come to see the display, and it has since grown to cover 30 acres with a train ride going through more than 10 acres of the property and a beautiful carousel with 16 adorned horses. Your visit must include a trip to the Old Country Store which was added in 1994 where you'll find over 300 varieties of Christmas and old-fashioned candy for sale. It's one of the largest candy stores around where you'll find old-time peppermint sticks, chocolates of any kind, fruit, nuts, even churned butter and country ham. You can even buy sodas in the retro-style glass bottles! Starting on Thanksgiving, the concession stand opens and sells hot chocolate, coffee, hot dogs and other things to keep you warm!

And, please don't forget... Santa Claus, is there, too! You'll find him in his own little house waiting to visit and hear the wishes of all the little (and BIG) children!!!

As you drive through on Godwin Lake Road, you'll notice the scenes set up depicting the life of Jesus. Meadow Lights endeavors to honor the true meaning of Christmas. Please come - gather family and friends to see the largest and oldest Christmas attraction in Eastern North Carolina! It's free to view, and you can see it all from your vehicle.

Need more info? Please visit [www.meadowlights.com](http://www.meadowlights.com) for schedules and directions.

MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM ALL IN THE MEADOW COMMUNITY!



Photos Courtesy of Meadow Lights

## Quick Tip:

### Extending the Flower Bed Through the Holiday Season

Valerie Little, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer



The winter garden, if not for its lack of color, provides so



Photo Courtesy of  
Valerie Little

much texture and depth from flower beds that burst with color from April to November. One option to extend the bygone season is to collect dried flowers and arrange them in wreaths and sprays. These, placed in outdoor containers, will create a welcome smorgasbord for the thistle and seed-loving songbirds.

## Monthly Garden Tasks

### DECEMBER GARDEN TASKS

#### LAWN CARE

- For cool season grasses, mow to 3 inches and remove leaves and other debris.
- Cool-season weeds in established dormant Zoysia or Bermuda grass lawns may be treated with broadleaf herbicides.
- NEVER burn off centipede grass to remove excess debris.
- Selected herbicides (like atrazine or simazine) can be applied to control annual bluegrass and several annual broadleaf weeds.

#### GENERAL REMINDERS

- Prune evergreens to use for winter decorations in the house by cutting out unwanted limbs that would be pruned in February anyway. Save major pruning for late winter. Holly, Magnolia, and Cedar foliage will last a long time.
- Prevent winter damage to plants from desiccation (drying out), freezing and thawing, and breakage from ice and snow loads. Keep plants watered during dry periods. Read How to Protect Plants from Cold Damage at <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-604.html>
- This is an excellent time to mulch shrubs, trees, perennials, and herbs for winter protection. Apply a layer 3 inch deep since most perennials are dormant, and it's easy to get a wheelbarrow into the garden. Mulch comparisons and general info: <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-608.html>
- Put your cut Holiday tree to use! Cut the branches and lay them over perennials to protect them from the cold. Shred small branches to make mulch.
- Do NOT prune fruit trees now. Fruit trees are best pruned late winter just before they start to grow in spring.
- Asparagus crowns can be planted now through March.



Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

#### WILDLIFE

- Clean bird feeders monthly with hot sudsy water and diluted bleach to prevent the spread of wild bird diseases. Keep seed hulls from accumulating underneath the feeder to discourage rodents.

## Cool Connections

[NC Extension Gardener Manual](#)

[Past Issues of Gardeners Dirt](#)

[NCSU Publication Links](#)

[NC Extension Gardening Portal](#)

[NC Extension Plant Database](#)

[Gardening News \(Gardening and Planting News, Plants\)](#)





Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

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## Upcoming Events

### Landscape Paving & Retaining Wall Installation Workshop

At the Johnston County Ag. Center (2736 NC 210 Hwy., Smithfield) on **Wednesday afternoon January 4th 2017** from **12:30PM until 4:30PM**. There will be a two-hour class and two-hour hands-on demonstration and attendees will learn the correct way to install both segmented retaining walls and interlocking concrete pavers in a residential application. You will learn individual material components and their purpose, industry mandated installation methods, basic design principles and if you are a business, tips to make your company more successful. Presenter will be Mason Dyer of Belgard Hardscapes.

### Become a Johnston County 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 26th, 2017. Classes will be held each Thursday afternoon from 1:30 to 4:30 for 15 weeks. Contact Marshall Warren for more information at [mhwarren@ncsu.edu](mailto:mhwarren@ncsu.edu). The fee for course is \$120. **The application and fee are due by January 5th, 2017.**

### Fruit & Nut Tree Pruning Workshop

Saturday **January 28th, 2017** 10:00am-12:00pm, taught by Dr. Mike Parker. At the Crop Research Station, 13223 US Business 70 West in Clayton.

### Blueberry Production Workshop

Thursday **February 9th, 2017** 1:00-4:00pm. Class begins at the Johnston County Ag Center Auditorium and then a short trip to a nearby blueberry farm for actual pruning demonstration.

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NEWSLETTER EDITED BY: Brooke Taylor

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 [Home Horticulture in Johnston County, NC](#)

[Johnston County NC Extension Master Gardener Volunteers](#)