

NC STATE**EXTENSION**

Master Gardener | Johnston County

The Gardener's Dirt Newsletter

December 2017

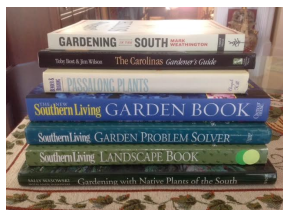


Photo Courtesy of
Brenda Clayton

Feature Article

A Gardening Book for Every Reason and Season

By Brenda Clayton, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Have you ever asked the same question to several people, hoping for a consensus? Favorite gardening books? No two answers alike! With such a diversity of gardening topics, it would require another book to cover them all!

So where to start? Let's begin with a trio of the best-selling Southern Living books that are loved by all and easy to find. The New Southern Living Garden Book has 2000 color photos, 500 garden ideas, 8000 flowers, veggies, trees, natives - you name it! A companion book is Southern Living Problem Solver which covers solving plant problems, pests, plant diseases, weeds, all with an ounce of prevention and a pound of cure! And the third is the Southern Living Landscape Book, full of beautiful examples of home landscapes, showing how to plan and design your yard using structures and plants, including garden makeovers.

Interested in secrets from a local southern gardening expert? Mark Weathington is the director of the JC Raulston Arboretum at NCSU. His new book, Gardening in the South, "is sure to become the new standard for transplanted gardeners as well as multi-generational southerners," says Tony Avent, owner of Plant Delights Nursery.

Know Steve Bender (Grumpy Gardener)? His Passalong Plants makes you appreciate a gardener's love of sharing and is an absolute delight to read! Want to grow native plants? Try Gardening with Native Plants of the South by Sally Wasowski. How

about vegetable gardening? L.A. Jackson, former editor of "Carolina Gardener Magazine", (also highly recommended), likes Vegetable Gardening in the Southeast by Ira Wallace.

In addition, gardening websites put information right at your fingertips at a moment's notice. The new NCSU Extension Master Gardeners Handbook is now available to the public at <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook>. Another excellent website is <https://search.extension.org> and just type in anything you're looking for. You won't be disappointed.

Websites are certainly responsive with sometimes more information than we can take in. A book, on the other hand, allows you to browse, look at the pictures, and leisurely think about your plants and plans. A good gardening book becomes a valuable, curl up in your favorite chair, reference that becomes a part of your personal library to which you can return again and again. One or two would fit very nicely under the Christmas tree!



Photo Courtesy of
JC Raulston Arboretum

Feature Plant

Christmas Jewel Holly PP 14477

Ilex x 'HL-10-90'

(Grown and recommended by the Johnston County Nurserymen)

By Marshall Warren, Horticulture Extension Agent

Christmas Jewel holly grows naturally dense, upright pyramidal with a slow growth rate. It grows to a height of 10 to 12 feet and with a spread of 8 feet making it perfect for a screen or specimen.

Responds well to sheering. Its evergreen foliage is small, long, dark polished green with spiny margins that are not sharp to the touch. One of its best attributes is that no pollinator is needed to produce its large, apple red berries that are displayed in great abundance. The berries begin showing in December and remain until late spring, making it excellent for cut winter decorations.

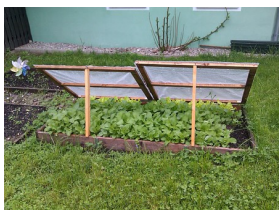


Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

A Veggie Tale

Cold Frames

By Tiffany Whichard, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

When bitter winter winds are lashing and the threat of yet another freeze looms, most of us want to hang up our trowels and call it a day. But there are things that you can do to help extend your growing season and protect plants. I won't cover them all here--

there isn't enough time--but let's talk about one simple and inexpensive way to help. It's called a cold frame.

Cold frames are simply a box with a clear top that can be vented. The bottom insulates against icy gusts and can be constructed out of cinder blocks, wood or even straw bales. The top helps retain moisture and warmth and is usually made of a frame with Plexiglass or a double-layered plastic inserted in it. It may be hinged, but that isn't necessary. The last cold frame top I had was anchored down with bricks. Some people even use salvaged windows to make their cold frame, but multiple windows are often too heavy to lift easily and are prone to breaking.

Should you want to construct a cold frame at your house, you can find detailed plans on the Web, including exact dimensions of lumber or other materials. If you buy one from a seed catalog or online retailer, they are usually built of a light-weight material. This allows the gardener to move it however they need, according to the season or changing sun exposure.

A few of you are asking, 'But why would I need a cold frame?'. Well, aside from being able to grow salad crops (like lettuce and radish) when it is not feasible to yet grow them in outside plots, it can also help you during Spring. See, tender plants need to 'harden off'. Basically, they need to get slowly acclimated to being outdoors. Cold frames can help provide a buffer and allow small seedlings a way to better transition. In addition to that, cold frames are great for forcing bulbs, propagating hardwood cuttings (trees and shrubs) and, depending on height, sometimes even growing flowers or other ornamentals.

For a very modest investment, you can build a cold frame that will help you not only in Fall and Winter, but also during the Spring. As always, if you have any questions about this or other ways to extend your season, don't hesitate to contact us.



Photo Courtesy of NC State

Quick Tips

Mulch Volcanos

By Tina Stricklen, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Do your trees look like they are about to erupt out of your garden? Mulch volcanos occur when too much mulch is piled up around the tree trunk. Over mulching can cause animal and disease problems and ultimately death of the tree. Mulching material should be 2 to 4 inches deep from the edge of the root ball out to the drip line. A good visual aid is to think of a donut so that you leave several inches around the tree trunk open.



Photo Courtesy of
Barb Barakat

Quick Tips

Heating the Soil for Starting Warm Season Crops indoors

By Barb Barakat, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Spread old Christmas lights and cover with 'reflective roll insulation' under your trays of seedlings to warm the soil - inexpensive and effective option to purchasing nursery heat pads. (I used a 'shrub blanket' web of old lights.)

I always warm the soil before setting the seed in early February for April 15th transplanting into the garden.

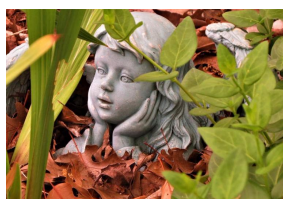


Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

Landscape Horticulture

Mulching and Weed Control

Marshall Warren, Horticulture Extension Agent

A two to three-inch layer of pine straw, bark mulch, or composted leaves will protect your plants from extreme temperatures, water loss and soil erosion. Over 5 inches of mulch will suffocate roots. After applying mulch be sure to pull it a few inches away from the base of the plants. A coarse winter mulch of leaves or cut Christmas tree boughs protect newly planted perennials and less hardy plants from severe cold. This mulch should be applied only after the ground cools in late fall. In the spring, if you covered tender perennials with mulch for protection, remove this carefully once you detect new plant growth in these beds.

One of the best times to apply new mulch to improve appearance and mulch thickness is just after all the deciduous tree leaves have fallen and before early spring before weed seeds germinate. Mulching is the best preventive method for controlling weeds. Periodic weeding of newly planted areas is necessary to control their spread. Try not to let the weeds get out of hand or they will re-seed themselves and you will have a greater weed problem. Get in the daily habit of surveying your grounds (as Thomas Jefferson did) to see how things are progressing and pull a few weeds as you see them.



Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

Monthly Gardening Tasks

December Gardening 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 centipedegrass 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, Cedar, and Nandina 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 inches 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.

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.

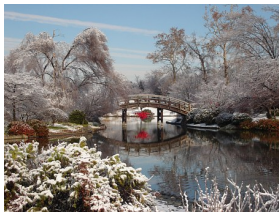


Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

Cool Connections

Helpful Links

[Read more»](#)

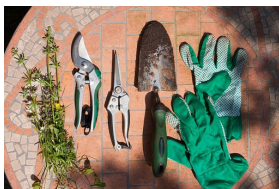


Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

Upcoming Events

[Become a Master Gardener](#)

[Blueberry and Grape Production and Pruning Workshop - February 17, 2018](#)

[Read more N.C. Cooperative Extension news»](#)



NC State University and N.C. A&T State University work in tandem, along with federal, state and local governments, to form a strategic partnership called N.C. Cooperative Extension.

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

Distributed in furtherance of the acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914. North Carolina State University and North Carolina A&T State University commit themselves to positive action to secure equal opportunity regardless of race, color, creed, national origin, religion, sex, age, veteran status, or disability. In addition, the two Universities welcome all persons without regard to sexual orientation. North Carolina State University, North Carolina A&T State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments cooperating.

Disclaimer agrichemicals:

Recommendations for the use of agricultural 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 North Carolina Cooperative Extension nor discrimination against similar products or services not mentioned. Individuals who use agricultural 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 regulations and examine a current product label before applying any chemical. For assistance, contact your county Cooperative Extension agent.