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Feature Article, Be Creative Grow Native, Good or Bad?, Visiting Great NC Gardens, Quick Tip:, Monthly Garden Tasks, Cool Connections, Upcoming Events



The Gardener's Dirt

Johnston County Center

June 2016

Feature Article

Golden Years Gardening Guidelines

Margy Pearl, Brenda Clayton, Chris Alberti, Joanne King,
Ester Garner, Katie Maynard, Jyl Burgener, Master Gardeners



Gardening is great exercise that gets us outdoors, keeps and increases our flexibility and strength and prevents osteoporosis. It's no surprise that gardeners generally eat more fruits and vegetables than their peers! And do you know that gardening is beneficial for your mental health? It reduces stress, improves mood and lowers the risk of dementia. Because gardening is an enjoyable and rewarding outdoor activity, gardeners tend to stick with it as they age! Chris reminds us that aging does not have to get in the way of spending time outside; nor should we give up something that we really enjoy!



Physical activity, even gardening, can result in aches, pains and possible injuries. So, regardless of whether or not we are "chronologically challenged", better gardening practices and the right tools can make a big difference. Here are suggestions from our Johnston County Master Gardeners to help all of us keep gardening safely throughout our Golden Years!

- Safety check your yard for anything that can cause falls. Falls are more likely to occur when we are tired. Carry a cell phone.
- Warm up muscles and avoid joint stress/strain by stretching or taking a short walk before beginning. Joanne advises us to change positions every 20 minutes to work different muscles and avoid stiffness.
- Avoid bending at the waist. Use a kneeling pad, low bench, garden scooter, or knee pads - all of which are easier on your back.
- Create easier access by using raised beds. Ester loves her raised beds and





Katie's cart



Photos by Chris Alberti

says it saves her back. Consider a waist high, platform type vegetable garden.

- Grow vertically with trellises. Katie tells us that training fruit trees as espaliers allows us to reach the fruit more easily.
- Plant container gardens where you can easily access them!
- Downsize from 5-gallon buckets to 2-gallon watering cans to avoid rotator cuff strain.
- Use a timed soaker hose or sprinkler watering system.
- Consider only low maintenance, drought tolerant plants that don't require pruning or dead-heading. Native perennials work beautifully!
- Consider a wagon or cart with large wheels that can be pushed. It is easy to see why this is Katie's preference. It is more balanced than a wheelbarrow.
- Katie says cutting is easier if you use pruners and loppers that have a ratchet system. Keep those blades sharp!
- Use a twist-type tiller instead of a shovel to loosen soil.
- Use long-handled, curved ergonomically designed garden tools for better leverage. Suggestions include step-on weeders and rakes that adjust in width to reach under shrubs. Look for cushioned grips.
- Use heavy duty "grabbers" to pick up pine needles and other yard debris. They can reach under shrubs and trees!
- Use a hand truck to move heavy objects. Pushing is easier than pulling, says Jyl.
- Carry a water bottle to stay hydrated. Garden in the coolest parts of the day. Have places to sit and relax throughout your yard.
- The last suggestion may be the hardest. Admit when you need help rather than chance an injury. And, stay off that ladder!

Be Creative, Grow Native

Blazing Star

Liatris spicata

Griffin David Lockett, Master Gardener

Liatris, with the common names of Blazing Star, Gayfeather, Colic root, or Snakeroot, is a beautiful herbaceous perennial that is a wonderful addition to your garden and landscape. It is a tall plant, ranging from 2 to 3 feet or more. The flowers, which bloom in the summer, are spikes about three quarters of an inch wide and several inches long, that grow on tall stems from bushy, grassy-like clumps of foliage. The flowers most commonly are deep purple, but may be red-purple, or white. An unusual feature of these flowers is that they bloom from the "top to the bottom" of the spikes.

Liatris are wonderfully easy to grow and maintain, especially once established. They grow best from corms or rhizomes planted in early spring, but they can be grown from seeds. At local nurseries they can be obtained already potted and ready for your garden. They require full sun, but can tolerate some partial shade. They should be planted at least 12-15 inches apart so they have room to spread. They require average soil, but prefer fertile and moist conditions. I mulch the area around my *liatris* with pine straw for weed suppression and to retain moisture.



Photo courtesy of floristtaxonomy.com



The advantages of this perennial are numerous. They are drought tolerant, deer resistant and, once established, require little water. They also do not



Photo courtesy of
floristtaxonomy.com

deer-resistant and, once established, require little water. They also do not require fertilizer, but I add a low level fertilizer in the spring before the foliage appears. I have learned that as the foliage begins to emerge in the spring, rabbits will enjoy the tender green leaves and I have protected mine with a wire cage until they are taller. Additionally, they attract birds, butterflies and other pollinators. The cut flowers are used in floral arrangements, and they also can be used as dried flowers.

Resources:

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu>

<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org>

<http://www.nichegardens.com>

Good or Bad?

Eastern Box Turtle

Terrapene carolina

Tina Stricklen, Master Gardener

Why did the turtle cross the road? To get to the Shell station! Bad jokes aside, have you ever wondered why you sometimes see turtles in the road or what to do if you saw one? If you can do it safely, pick it up and move it to the side it was heading. More than likely, it's looking for food.



Photo courtesy of Tina Stricklen

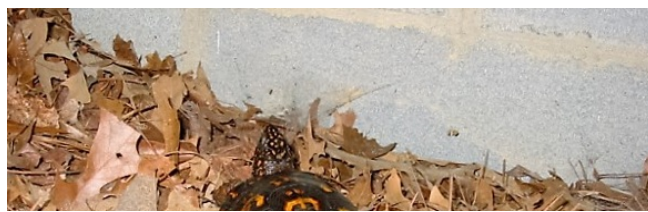
The Eastern Box Turtle is so named because it can completely box itself inside its shell when it feels threatened. While it is a hardy creature with a good defensive system, scientists believe their numbers are diminishing. Like so much wildlife, box turtles are victims of urban sprawl which threatens their habitat either by fragmentation or by completely wiping it out.

Eastern Box Turtles take up to 10 years to sexually mature and with less-than-brisk reproduction rates, losing them to road mortality has pushed their numbers down. Furthermore, they are susceptible to poachers who take them from the wild and sell them in the pet trade. Another factor affecting their

population is the well-meaning animal lover who takes a turtle home only to later decide they want to release it back into the wild. Interestingly, turtles have a homing instinct. If they are moved outside their base area, which is roughly 200 feet in diameter, they will wander until they die.

Omnivores, they eat basically whatever they can fit in their mouth. This includes but is not limited to berries, seeds, roots, mushrooms, grasses, toads, slugs, snails, frogs and carrion. Gardeners, take note! Turtles in your landscape are a good thing! Personally, I am all for encouraging these benign creatures if they will help take out a few slugs and snails!

Nurturing box turtles in your garden can be achieved by cultivating plant species like berries and allowing some to ripen and fall. Leaving leaf litter beneath trees so they can forage for prey as well as overwintering encouraged. Creating a safe



well as overwinter is encouraged. Creating rain gardens but not pools of water (they don't swim) will allow them to cool off during hot summer days. The most important thing you can do is locate the turtle habitat as far away as possible from roadways.

Admired by many, the Eastern Box Turtle became the designated State Reptile in 1979. Maintaining a welcoming environment for these wild and wonderful creatures is not only good for them but good for your garden too.

Resources:

http://www.ncwildlife.org/Portals/0/Learning/documents/Profiles/Eastern_Box_Turtle.pdf

<https://www.nwf.org/News-and-Magazines/National-Wildlife/Animals/Archives/2012/Box-Turtles.aspx>

<http://www.bio.davidson.edu/people/midorcas/research/contribute/box%20turtle/boxmain.htm>



Photo courtesy of Tina Stricklen

Visiting Great NC Gardens

Raleigh Rose Garden

Tina Stricklen, Master Gardener

The Raleigh Rose Garden is a veritable hidden treasure near the downtown area of Raleigh. It is flanked by the Raleigh Little Theatre to the east as well as a 2,000-seat amphitheater to the south, making it a very special venue. When you make your approach from the west side off Gardner Street and down the length of wooden steps, you will not believe your eyes. The garden floor below is covered in well-maintained rows of beautiful roses. It is not an exaggeration when I tell you that this place is magical.



Situated in a verdant oval-shaped bowl, the garden is actually the former location of the grounds of the old State Fair race track ravine. You can even imagine horses running around Pogue Street if you take a look at an aerial shot on a map.

What's also interesting is that the roses are part of the display garden for all new roses presented by the All American Rose Society. In fact, it is one of three such accredited gardens in the Carolinas. The grounds include sixty beds with 56 varieties of roses encompassing hybrid teas, floribundas, grandifloras, miniatures and antiques.

As if that wasn't enough, there is a curved stone arbor located along the northern end of the garden and a nearby water fountain. This isn't an exclusive rose garden however, as there is an outstanding collection of shade plants. Included in the plant list are abundant hostas, hellebores and aspidistras all set against a backdrop of mature hemlock trees.



This 6.7-acre garden is owned by the City of Raleigh and is open to the public year round. Even when the roses aren't in full bloom there are lots of things to pique your interest. The winter months are just as interesting with the evergreens and beautiful sweeping views of the grounds. You should take a trip and visit this storied garden and its renowned theatre, which is in its 75th year.



theatre, which is in its 75th year.

The garden and theatre are located at 301 Pogue Street, Raleigh NC 27607.

Resources:

<http://raleighlittletheatre.org/about/rosegarden.html>

Quick Tip:

Lacewing vs Lace Bug

Deborah Crandall, Master Gardener

Do you have many kinds of insects hanging around your plants and vegetables during this mid-spring season? Did you know that some of these insects might actually be beneficial for your garden? Do you know which are good and which are bad?

These are some important questions to answer before you decide what to do. Ladybugs, green lacewings, praying mantids and the like are the good bugs. They eat the aphids, scales, thrips and other insects that can damage your flowers and vegetables. There are two broad types of beneficial insects: predators and parasites. Insect predators actively seek out and eat their prey. They include ladybugs, green or brown lacewings, syrphid flies, and mantids. Adult lacewings are about 1/2 to 1 inch long, light green, and have netlike wings that are positioned like roofs over their bodies when at rest.



Lacewing

One example of a bad bug is the lace bug. Each species of lace bug specializes in feeding on a specific plant species or plant family. Adult lace bugs are about 1/8 inch long with an elaborately sculptured dorsal (upper) surface. The expanded surfaces of their thorax and forewings have numerous, semitransparent cells that give the body a lace-like appearance, hence the name "lace bug."

The names of lace bugs typically indicate the types



of plants upon which they feed. For example, sycamore lace bugs only feed upon sycamore trees, while lantana lace bugs only feed on lantana. Azalea lace bugs (*Stephanitis pyrioides*) feed on azaleas but do not seriously damage the azaleas.



Lace bug

However, this common pest can make them appear sickly and off-color. The azalea lace bugs overwinter in the egg stage and hatch in early spring. Planting azaleas in the right location out of direct sun will help prevent lace bugs from infecting your plants. Apply horticultural oil in late winter or early spring as soon as nymphs appear and before the first adults lay eggs. If insect numbers begin to build in June, re-apply insecticidal soap for low populations, otherwise use acephate (Orthene), or imidacloprid (Merit). Follow label directions.

No longer should we assume that "the only good bug is a dead bug". Many of the insects in your garden are your friends and help to control other harmful insects. You can read about all the good and bad insects at the following websites.

Resources:

<https://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/O&T/shrubs/ort039e/ort039e.htm>

http://oregonstate.edu/dept/nurspest/Azalea_lacebug.pdf

<http://www.insectidentification.org/insect-description.asp?identification=green-lacewing>

<https://growingasmallfarms.ces.ncsu.edu/growingasmallfarms-insects/>

https://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/quickref/pest%20management/plants_attract_beneficial.html

Monthly Garden Tasks

JUNE GARDEN TASKS

LAWN CARE

- When do you water your lawn? When the grass blades are just starting to curl and your footprints remain on the lawn when you walk on it. Applying an inch of water in the early morning allows the lawn to dry during the day. When the ground is dry, cycling the irrigation, applying a little at a time will allow the water to soak deep into the soil. It's a good time to plant new sod in damaged areas. Get your soil tested first. Come by the Ag Center for a soil kit.
- Grasses vary in their needs for nutrients, mowing height and watering. To learn how to best care for your grass type check out the Lawn Maintenance Calendar for your grass and learn how best to care for it, month by month. This is NOT the time for planting or fertilizing fescue! Wait until the fall.
- Mow fescue at a height of 3-3 ½ inches to help it survive hot, dry periods. Fescue is a cool season grass that slows down in the summer and if cut too short the tender roots will be exposed to extreme heat which will certainly damage, if not kill, it. It is difficult for fescue to recover from being cut too short as it is not actively growing at this time.
- Check out Turffiles at www.turffiles.ncsu.edu to see the Maintenance Calendar for your particular grass. There is also a lawn care app available at the Apple App Store!



TREES, SHRUBS & ORNAMENTALS

- Prune climbing roses after they bloom, then fertilize them to stimulate new growth. This summer's growth carries next year's buds, so keep the plants growing vigorously! Train long shoots horizontally to stimulate more branching.
- As soon as their foliage dies, dig bulb clumps of daffodils, crocus, Dutch iris, etc. that have become crowded. Divide and replant bulbs immediately, or store them in a cool, dry place for planting this fall. Please note that tulips and hyacinths generally don't perennialize in our area because our spring and winter is too warm.
- Give plants room to grow. Pull/transplant excess seedlings of marigold, cosmos, zinnias, etc. Growing plants need room to develop. Spacing plants properly reduces the risk of fungal diseases like powdery mildew.

midew.

- Remove faded flowers. Many annuals and perennials will stop blooming once they've started to set seed. Dead heading or removing spent flowers will prolong the bloom period.
- Pinch growing tips of ornamentals to encourage compact, sturdy, branched growth with lots of blooms.
- Protect plants from dehydration. Transplanting on overcast days, early in the morning, or late in the afternoon will reduce water loss in transplants. Keep newly planted ornamentals well watered for the first several days. Apply a 2-3 inches layer of mulch to conserve water and keep roots cool.

EDIBLES

- Squash plants wilting? Squash vine borers may be the culprit. Check near the base of the plant for a small hole and a mass of greenish-yellow excrement. Slitting open the stem may reveal the villain - a fat, white caterpillar. It may be possible to save the plant by removing the caterpillar, then covering the injured vine with moist soil to encourage rooting.
- Warmer temperatures and longer days send a signal to spring greens that it is time to flower (bolt). At this point leaves generally do not taste as good. Once this quick process starts, there is no turning back. To delay bolting try the following. Cover spring salad greens with a cardboard box in mid afternoon. Remove it after sunset and give the plants a slurp of water to cool them down. This procedure fools the plants into thinking the days are shorter than they actually are and can delay bolting by a couple of weeks.

LANDSCAPE IDEAS

- Tropical natives make excellent additions to our summer gardens, with colorful foliage, bright flowers, and heat-loving constitutions. They can't survive our winters, but we can try overwintering our favorites indoors. Ornamental peppers and Jerusalem cherries are also heat-lovers. More exotic tropicals, such as Alternanthera (Joseph's Coat), Plectranthus (with lovely gray felt leaves), and Acalypha (Copper Plant) are also available. Visit the J.C. Raulston Arboretum at NCSU to see first-hand how tropicals can spice up the summer garden.
- Mulch flower beds and vegetable gardens now to reduce watering chores later. Choose a mulch that will enhance the beauty of your garden. Check out <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-608.html>
- Keep outdoor potted plants watered as they lose a lot of moisture during the hot days. If you're going on vacation, ask a friend to check your plants regularly.

Cool Connections

[NC Extension Gardener Manual](#)

[Past Issues of Gardeners Dirt](#)

[NCSU Publication Links](#)

[NC Extension Gardening Portal](#)

[NC Extension Plant Database](#)

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

[NCSU Pruning Trees and Shrubs](#)

[Cooperative Extension Search](#)





Upcoming Events

A-Z Gardening Class

Classes have just started but you are still welcome to join. During this 12 week class you will learn about vegetable gardening and have the opportunity for hands on experience as well. The gardening class will meet weekly on Wednesday evenings from 6:30pm until 8:00pm at the Clayton Community Center located at 715 Amelia Church Road in Clayton. To register for the class come by the Clayton Community Center.

JOCO Plants Summer Nursery and Landscape Trade Show - July 13th

The Trade Show will be held at the Kerr Scott Building, NC Fairgrounds 1025 Blue Ridge Blvd., in Raleigh on **July 13th** from 9:00am until 3:00pm. Many nurseries from the Johnston County Nursery Marketing Association will display their plants and many landscape vendors will be there as well. It's a great opportunity to talk to growers. Registration for a 2 hour demonstration on "Hardscape Best Practices" class begins at 9-9:30am. You will learn the correct way to install segmental retaining walls and interlocking concrete pavers. A "Plant Walk" with Mark Weathington from the JC Raulston Arboretum on the trade show floor begins at 1:30pm until 2:30pm. His class will take participants through the nursery vendors display space highlighting plants which are new or underutilized in the trade with particular emphasis on plants that solve problems.

NEWSLETTER EDITED BY: Brenda Clayton

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

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

