

Feature Article, Grow Native, Good or Bad, Quick Tip:, Horticulture Landscaping, Monthly Garden Tasks, Cool Connections, Upcoming Events



The Gardener's Dirt

Johnston County Center

January 2017

Feature Article

The Wonderful Gifts that "Keep On Giving"

Brooke Taylor, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Were you fortunate enough to receive a gift plant for the holidays and are now faced with the question, "What, exactly, should I do to keep it growing?"

Here are a few common gift plants and best practices to keep them thriving. Most gift plants are originally from tropical climates and cannot be transplanted to our Carolina gardens, but it is possible to grow and enjoy them indoors throughout the holiday season and some even year after year.



Photo Courtesy of Brooke Taylor

Poinsettias, a native of Mexico, can be adapted to your home during the holiday season by choosing a spot out of a draft with at least 6 hours of bright, indirect light, keeping the soil moist and removing or cutting a hole in any foil surrounding the plant that prevents drainage. Over-wintering Poinsettia requires an abundance of effort; and, sadly, it will not be as lush as those grown professionally in a greenhouse environment. For that reason, many choose to enjoy them through February when their color begins to fade.

Christmas Cactus - *Zygocactus* (*Schlumbergera*), is another beautiful holiday plant. Unlike Poinsettia, they are easily adapted to the home environment and many grow

into large blooming specimen plants. Originally from Brazil, their indoor culture mimics Poinsettia - 6 hours of bright, indirect light and soil kept moist while blooming and growing. They enjoy and benefit from a shaded spot outside or on a porch during the warmer months being sure to keep them watered and bring them indoors when temperatures start dropping below 70. The trick in getting them to re-bloom is coaxing them into dormancy from September to December - withholding food, water and, most importantly, light during the evening hours. They enjoy direct sunlight during the dormant/winter cycle and will start forming buds; however, any light after 5:00 p.m. will result in bud drop. Once you see the plant budding, resume watering and feeding and get ready to enjoy a full blooming Christmas Cactus again!



Photo Courtesy of Brooke Taylor



Photo Courtesy of Brooke Taylor

Another much gifted plant is an orchid. Orchids are found throughout the world from the Himalayan Mountains to the rain forests of Thailand. With over 30,000 species, their culture is as diverse as their origins. The most often gifted orchid is the Phalaenopsis - the most easily adapted to an indoor environment. Originally from China, it is now grown throughout the world and is one of the most popular due to its success with indoor gardeners. They are warm-growing orchids and adapt well to temperatures inside our homes.

Phals, like most orchids, are epiphytes meaning they grow from the air around them. In their original habitat, they are attached to trees or stones allowing them to breathe and grow.

Adapting them as houseplants, requires they be potted in a porous medium that drains easily and keeps their roots from rotting - a mix of bark and moss allows the roots to breathe as they do in the wild.

Water them thoroughly about once a week and allow them to dry slightly before watering again. To quote the American Orchid Society, "Nothing -- repeat, NOTHING -- kills an orchid faster than letting it sit in a water-logged pot, since a lack of oxygen will cause the roots to suffocate and rot."

Phalaenopsis, a low-light orchid as compared to many varieties, do well with bright indirect light. Leaf color shows if the light is correct. Maintaining a grass-green leaf color indicates adequate light. South and East facing windows are best.

After dropping its last blossom, cut the stem directly below the last blooming node. This encourages the stem to bloom again. Under the right conditions, you can expect 2 to 3 blooming cycles each year from your Phalaenopsis.

Consider moving your orchids to a covered porch for the summer allowing them to enjoy the humidity they thrive on in the wild. Keep them out of any direct sun that will burn the leaves and continue to water them as you do indoors. Bring them inside when night temperatures drop below 65 degrees.

I hope you'll enjoy your gift plant indoors while awaiting the growing season we all look forward to in the Spring!

Sources:

<http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/plants/indoor/flowering/hgic1561.html>

<http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/plants/indoor/flowering/hgic1554.html>

Grow Native

Wax Myrtle - *Myrica cerifera*

Eloise Adams, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Myrica cerifera (Wax Myrtle, Southern Wax Myrtle, Southern Bayberry) is a plant that fulfills many needs in the landscape. Do you need an evergreen screening hedge, an evergreen small tree/large shrub, a fast grower that's wildlife friendly and yet is still an attractive specimen plant? Then, wax myrtle is the plant for you - it has great versatility. It's considered to be a fast grower, sometimes up to five feet per year, and can reach 15-20 feet in height with an equivalent spread. It forms a large shrub or a small multi-branched tree with an interesting natural form that allows for enjoyment of the irregular shapes of the trunks, which have a smooth light gray, almost white, bark. Wax myrtle is a prolific suckering



Photo Courtesy of JC Raulston Arboretum

plant but you can prune those away to prevent a thicket from forming. If you prefer, there are dwarf varieties in the market place.

Its hardiness zone is 7-11 and ranges widely from the Florida Keys, north to southern New Jersey, west to east Texas and southeast to Oklahoma. It is also native to Bermuda, the Bahamas, the eastern Caribbean and Central America. The plant prefers full sun but will grow in partial shade. Wax myrtle prefers rich, acid soils but adapts to most soil types. It fixes atmospheric nitrogen which permits survival in miserable soils.

It is heat and drought tolerant and has few insect problems. The plants flower from February to June and are wind pollinated. The flowers are tiny yellow-green and are slightly aromatic. Female plants bear berries that grow in clusters with a bluish-white wax coating with a gray appearance. Berries persist throughout the winter and are a magnet for many varieties of birds.

Propagation is mainly by transplants. Hardwood stem tips can be rooted. Chunks of root mass or suckers can be dug up and transplanted, and new growth will quickly develop. By transplanting root mass or suckers from a plant of known gender, the gardener can select plants that bear fruit. You can also propagate by seed stratification. Another positive attribute of wax myrtle is that it is deer resistant.

Sources:

http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/GardenPubsAZ/wax_myrtle.pdf

Manual of Woody Landscape Plants by Michael A. Dirr

Gardening With Native Plants of the South by Sally Wasowski with Andy Wasowski

Good or Bad

Pest Alert: Crape Myrtle Bark Scale - New Tree Pest Has Arrived in NC

Marshall Warren, Horticulture Extension Agent

Crape myrtle bark scale (CMBS) is a serious new threat to crape myrtles. It threatens to turn what has historically been a beautiful, low-maintenance landscape tree into an unsightly, high-maintenance landscape tree. Crape myrtle bark scale is a felt scale that was first discovered in Richardson, TX in 2004, and has since spread throughout the southeastern U.S. and was found in North Carolina in August, 2016. This discovery is bad news because crape myrtles are one of our most commonly planted trees in yards and along streets.



Photo Courtesy of SD Frank

Crape myrtle bark scale is relatively easy to identify. It is one of the only scales known to infest crape myrtles. Most gardeners are first alerted to CMBS by the presence of black sooty mold on the bark. Sooty mold may be mistaken for that of the crape myrtle aphid, a common insect pest on crape myrtles. However, the presence of the white adult scales on the bark and twigs, and the pink blood exuded when crushed, distinguishes this scale from crape myrtle aphids. Any crape myrtle that is covered with sooty mold should be carefully examined for CMBS. Sometimes trees have heavy infestations of aphids and CMBS. Aphids will only feed on the leaves; CMBS will feed mainly on the twigs, branches, and trunk, and rarely on the leaves.

Although CMBS is easy to detect and identify on heavily infested plants, low infestations on recently infested plants are hard to spot. Inspect plants carefully before purchasing. Be aware that most of the scale will be on small twigs and branches in the upper part of the tree. Long-range dispersal of CMBS occurs through movement of infested plants. Please inspect crape myrtle material prior to transporting from one location to another.

Control options for CMBS fall into four major categories: exclusion, plant selection, plant destruction, and insecticide treatment. Biological control may one day be a fifth option; but, other than naturally occurring lady beetles, effective biological control agents are not currently available. There are many homes that have crape myrtles. Inspect these trees to determine if they have become infested. Also, consider diversifying the trees you plant. If you suspect you may have this pest, please contact your nearest county extension agent for recommendations. See links and video below for more info and control measures.

Sources:

<http://ecoipm.org/2016/08/08/crape-myrtle-bark-scale-new-tree-pest-has-arrived-in-nc/>

<http://citybugs.tamu.edu/files/2010/05/EHT-049-Crape-myrtle-bark-scale.pdf>

<https://extension.msstate.edu/sites/default/files/publications/publications/p2938.pdf>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mt-0LBS4Akg>

Quick Tip:

Christmas Trees Are for the Birds!

Tiffany Whichard, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Wilted Christmas trees can provide a wildlife refuge for our feathered friends. Clear the tree of any tinsel, garland, flocking, hooks or ornaments. Place it on a brush pile or anchor it securely to a post. This will create a natural roosting area, giving animals shelter



Photo Courtesy of
Pixabay

from winter weather. Attract an even larger variety of birds by tucking in treats like suet, fruit slices and dried sunflower seed heads.

Landscape Horticulture

(Editor's Note: We are fortunate to have Marshall Warren as Extension Agent for the Master Gardener Volunteers in Johnston County. Marshall has extensive experience in professional landscape horticulture. As we were planning articles to be written for The Gardeners Dirt in 2017, we felt it would be wonderful to have Marshall share his expertise with our readers. This is the first in a series of articles that Marshall will be writing throughout the year. We are blessed ... enjoy!)

Landscape Planning and Site Analysis

Marshall Warren, Horticulture Extension Agent

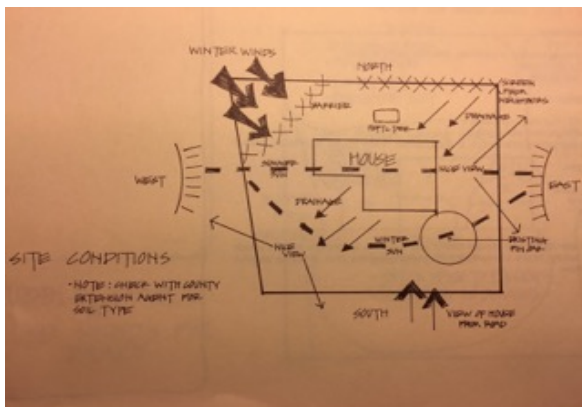


Photo Courtesy of Marshall Warren

You may have an existing landscape that needs renovating or have moved into a new home. Either way, a little forethought and planning can save time, effort and money and will help you to organize your site for maximum use and enjoyment. Most people think of a landscape plan as an arrangement of plants around a home foundation. But a landscape plan is a design of a conscious arrangement of your outdoor space, that considers your site conditions and features. If done correctly, it will create an aesthetically pleasing and functional landscape. This planning process is possibly the most important aspect of residential landscaping and is often neglected.

First, make an inventory map of your property and identify existing property line boundaries, home orientation, physical features, i.e. soils, trees, shrubs, views, wind direction, site potentials. From this information, develop a site analysis and determine how you can address problems and take advantage of existing opportunities. Interpret your conditions such as sun, shade, wet and dry areas, drainage, slope and potential erodible areas, traffic circulation and views.

Things to take note of:

- North side of buildings are always shady
- Afternoon shade is on the east side of a structure
- Southwest side of structure is always going to receive the hottest sun unless shaded by a tree
- Microclimate areas
- Water moves downhill - will water drain away from the home and are there places where water settles
- Soil conditions - good or bad drainage and its ability to grow plants (pH & nutrients)
- Underground and overhead utility and power lines, septic tank and/or sewer easements, right of ways, and restrictive covenants.
- Paths for vehicular and pedestrian traffic

Begin to create a design that will correct and enhance areas to best utilize your property and create curb appeal. Assess your family's needs and determine areas to utilize space for these needs. Consider access to and around the house. Determine family activities such as outdoor entertaining, pet and children's play areas, ornamental and vegetable gardening, etc. Plan for utility storage areas and future yard maintenance issues.

Consider plants and hardscape features as you would furniture in your home. Arrange them on your plan to create spaces, focal points and views, garden rooms, direct traffic flow patterns, make changes in elevation, and create transition spaces. Consider formal or informal design. Think about color and patterns. Your goal is a garden that will be both aesthetically pleasing and functional. Don't worry yet about what specific plant goes where, just consider them for their size and form. I will cover this and help educate you on plant choice in the next "Gardener's Dirt" issue. Stay tuned.

Monthly Garden Tasks

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".



Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

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.

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](#)



Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

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. The name of the course is "Hardscape Installation Best Practices" and it is approved for 3.5L credit hours. The course number is CE 609. Free Workshop-To Register-email cblassit@ncsu.edu or call 919-989-5380 -with your name and a good phone number.

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. 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.

NEWSLETTER EDITED BY: Brooke Taylor

*** If you would like to receive this newsletter monthly via email, send an email to mhwarren@ncsu.edu asking to be added to "The Gardener's Dirt" email list.

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.

Contact: **Marshall Warren**, Extension Agent Commercial and Consumer Horticulture

2736 NC 210 Hwy, Smithfield, NC 27577
919-989-5380

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

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