

The Gardener's Dirt Newsletter

January 2019

Feature Article:

Gardeners as Stewards of the Earth

By Barb Barakat

Extension Master Gardener Volunteer



Perhaps the Dalai Lama says it best: 'Our prime purpose in this life is to help others and if you can't help, at least do no harm.' In an ever complex world, stewardship is a mix of doing right and doing no harm to natural resources. Mother Earth attends our

needs - the sun warms us, trees shade us, water quenches us, soil brings forth sustenance.

Stewardship is attending to the needs of Mother Nature - using strategies that enable us to meet our present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Sometimes Mother Nature needs a boost - think of it like a vitamin - administer in small doses & in ways that mimic natural processes. When we apply these attitudes, we are stewards of the Earth. It's not hard to begin:

- *Get outside and have fun - while you're there, observe what's going on around you*
- *When you plant, choose native plants - they'll thrive where you live - buy local at road-side nurseries or ask your neighbor to take a cutting and propagate your own.*
- *Plant a wildflower garden - create beauty for you & habitat for pollinators - save the date - Sept 14, 2019 - and plan to attend our symposium*
- *Use people power, not machinery - we don't pollute or raise the carbon level*
- *Intercept erosion and runoff - stabilize the slope with stones & logs*
- *Keep the soil covered - plant native grasses - if you fertilize & water minimally, grass grows slower - less mowing, more time for fun*
- *Get good with the messy look - nature thrives where many different kinds of plants share the same space - go low on fertilizers, pesticides & herbicides*
- *Recycle paper, plastics, metals - support renewable energy initiatives*
- *Compost your organic waste - turn this year's veggie scraps into next year's soil*
- *Reuse manufactured items - find creative ways to use what you have to get what you need - be nature's restore*
- *Make your next purchase solar-powered*
- *Eat lots of vegetables and whole grains - you're part of nature too - feel good*
- *Smile - so many and so much to be grateful for*

Stewardship is a lifestyle . . . a healthy one. Getting started is the only hard step - once you activate it, you'll feel great about your positive impact - your small corner does matter. Keep open to inspiration.



The problematic crevice is a natural formation. Our goal is to: slow erosion by lessening the volume & force of the rainwater runoff



Steward Action #1: Slowing the flow in the creek with partial dams



Steward Action #2
Diverting runoff over larger area and slowing it with log terracing

Time to Prune Grapevines Will Be Here Soon

By: Jessica Strickland
Wayne County Horticulture Extension Agent

It will soon be that time of the year again to begin many pruning chores in the landscape and garden. One of the major pruning chores includes pruning grapevines.

The common type of grapevine grown in Eastern North Carolina is muscadines. Muscadine grapes are native to the Southeastern United States and are easier to grow than many other types of grapes because they have a high tolerance to pests and diseases.



A common question about grapevines what time of year do we prune them. The best time to prune grapevines is during late winter, usually February, while the vine is dormant and before growth begins in the spring.

There used to be concern about the vines "bleeding" if pruned too late during the dormant season but it has been found that the vines "bleeding" or dripping sap after pruning cuts does not have a negative impact on vines.

When it comes to how to prune grapevines, the answer is a longer explanation. Mature vines left unpruned can become a tangled mess of unproductive wood. Pruning is the key to maintaining healthy wood that will produce fruit. For those that do or have seen grapevines pruned properly realize that you are cutting a lot of growth off the vines. Cutting this much of the vine away can scare some people who are pruning vines for the first time. Grapevines produce a lot of new growth each year, so you need to cut away a large portion of last year's growth to allow room for new growth next season.

The shoots or canes of new growth, which is where the grapes will come from, come from the buds set on the last year's growth. During the dormant season, shoots from last year's growth should be cut back to 2 to 3 buds. Shoots that arise from older wood usually do not produce fruit. It is very important that when you make pruning cuts, the 2 to 3 buds you are leaving are from last year's growth and not from older wood. The one-year-old wood is the only source of fruitful shoots on the vine. So, it is important to leave enough of last year's growth to get grapes on the vines.

Since you are leaving 2 to 3 buds of last year's growth, each year that you prune your vine you will be making your cuts a little farther away from the vine's main arms. You want shoots to be spaced out evenly across the arms, so you may completely take out some shoots that are too close to other shoots. You will also want to remove entire shoots that are dead, damaged, or smaller than the diameter of a pencil. These types of canes are weak and will have poor fruit production.

If you have recently planted vines that are 1 to 2 years old, then your pruning job is a little different than that of a mature vine. When pruning new vines, you are focused on training the vine to grow on the trellis instead of focusing on fruit production. For the first couple of seasons after planting, you should focus more on training the main trunk and arms of the vine on the trellis. You may have some fruit the first few years but training the vine first will be beneficial in fruit production in future years.

After planting, prune the stem back to 2 buds. As new growth begins, select the most vigorous shoot to be your main trunk and cut away the others. You can stake this shoot to encourage it to grow up right towards your trellis. When tying up the shoot, remember to avoid tying it too tightly to prevent girdling of the vine. During the first year, continue tying the shoot upright as it grows, while removing any side shoots. When the single shoot is several inches (6 to 8 inches) above the wire of your trellis, cut the top of the shoot off a few inches below the

wire (6 inches). By cutting the shoot tip off, you are causing the vine to produce side shoots at that cut. As the side shoots grow, select the most vigorous ones and train them down the wire which will form your main "arms" or "cordons" on the wires. After the cordons have developed to full length, side shoots can be allowed to develop. Then you will treat it as a mature vine and let the side shoots grow and prune them back to 2 or 3 buds every year during the dormant season.

By understanding how Muscadine grape vines grow and produce fruit, pruning then will not be such a confusing and scary task. Instead proper pruning will allow for you to enjoy a great grape harvest later this year.



Before and after pruning a Muscadine grape vine. Pictures by Connie Fisk_ NC State University.

[Click here to join us for our Blueberry and Grape Production and Pruning Workshop on February 21, 2019 from 1-4 pm.](#)

[Click for A Step-by-Step Approach to Pruning Carlos Muscadine Grapevines](#)

Winter Tip:



Winter Coping Tips for Gardeners

By: Griffin David Lockett-Extension Master

Gardener Volunteer

Winter is not best or favorite season. It is often a time when we are indoors because of the weather; when I want to be outside. Gardening serves many purposes for me and perhaps for you also. It may be your place of: renewal, solitude, peace, reflection, escape, therapy, quiet, and of course we love to grow things.

But alas, it is winter, and these are some things that I do that I offer that you may also

do to weather the winter. First, I am a very grateful person for simple things, and I get excited seeing where a bud will open, and I have several *Lonicera fragrantissima* (Sweet

Breath of Spring or Winter honeysuckle) strategically placed where I can enjoy their fragrance even now. I also have Camellias, Hellebores, and Pansies for winter color. A person who does not garden, recently asked what she could do that is simple and easy. She does have a brightly painted front door and so I suggested a pot of pansies on both sides of her front door.

I survey and inventory my gardens and landscape. With no foliage, on some plants, I can really see the structure and form and decide what might need to be modified. Some errant branches get clipped or reduced because I did not get to them earlier. Weather permitting, I edge beds where my centipede "slightly" got away from my border during the hot months. Take a mug, not a cup, of your favorite hot beverage (coffee, tea, or mulled wine) outside when it is clear, but sunny and cold and slowly look at all you did in spring and summer. Remember all the bulbs that you added in the fall and how great they will look when the break through the soil in the spring. I have five bird feeders, including suet cakes, that I keep filled, and in winter I have more time to really look and listen which does my soul good. I keep one hummingbird feeder up all winter, because a friend versed in ornithology keeps promising me that there is a species of hummingbird that remains here during the winter. I have not seen one yet, but I am hopeful.

I also buy cut and potted flowers for our home and place them where I can enjoy the colors. I also get great joy by sending arranged flowers to family and neighbors. It is very uplifting to my spirit for people to receive them who I know will be surprised and really enjoy them. Finally, there are the seed catalogs that arrive uninvited, but I try to exert discipline and only keep a few. I can always add another plant somewhere.

Tough Houseplants

By: Eloise Adams-Extension Master Gardener Volunteer



1. Snake Plant (*sansevieria trifasciata*)
2. Cast-Iron Plant (*aspidistra elatior*)
3. Zeezee Plant (*zamioculcas zamiifolia*)
4. Chinese Evergreen (*aglaonema commutatum*)
5. Pothos-Devil's Ivy (*Epipremnum aureum*)
6. Heart Leaf Ivy (*Philodendron*)
7. Parlor Palm (*Chamaedorea Elegans*)

Few plants thrive in low light; at best they can be said to tolerate it. The plants in this article are some of the ones which will tolerate low light. Perhaps the first one that comes to mind is the Snake Plant (*Sansevieria trifasciata*) also known as Mother-in-Law's tongue. It is legendary for its ability to tolerate drought and neglect. Let the potting mix dry slightly between waterings. We were an Air Force family so moving was a way of life for us. We moved from Harlingen, Texas to Fayetteville, North Carolina. I had a small snake plant on top of the refrigerator (talk about poor conditions). After the packers left I noticed that the plant was missing. When we were unpacking in Fayetteville, a few weeks later, I found the plant snugly wrapped in paper with the dishes, none the worse for wear. I gave it a little drink and it survived the ordeal. S.

trifasciata 'Hahnii' is a dwarf snake plant that forms dense rosettes of broad dark green leaves. One of the best plants when it comes to air purification.

In addition, is the Cast-iron plant (*Aspidistra elatior*). Very few plants are as easy to grow as cast-iron plants. It tolerates extremely low light, and as long as it is watered thoroughly, then dried slightly, it will flourish easily.

Another type of tough houseplant, is called the Zeezee plant (*Zamioculcas zamiifolia*). The whole plant is dark green and forms a rosette of thick fleshy leaf stalks. With time it produces offsets. In time, it produces offsets. When caring for a zeezee plant, allow the potting mix dry slightly between waterings. This particular plant tolerates long periods of drought. However, it is a toxic plant.

As well, there is the Chinese Evergreen (*Aglaonema commutatum*). It is slow-growing, but dependable choice for use in low light situations. It is an upright plant with thick, non-branching stems and long, leathery, often silver mottled dark green leaves. Keep evenly moist and try to avoid over watering it. Its sap contains oxalic acid, which causes irritation if ingested.

Next, is Pothos, Devil's Ivy (*Epipremnum aureum*). It is popular for its marbled foliage and vining habit. This plant is easily grown in almost any condition. Pothos is generally used as a vining ground cover, or as a cascading accent plant. Extremely low light causes spindly growth. Try to keep pothos plants evenly moist to maintain health.

Finally, is the Heart-leaf Philodendron (*Philodendron scandens oxycardium*, also known as *P. cordatum*). It has many glossy, deep green leaves, and is the most popular philodendron grown in North America and one of the easiest of all houseplants. All parts of the plant are toxic and the sap irritates the skin. To maintain, keep evenly moist.

In contrast, for a tropical effect try the Parlor Palm (*Chamaedorea elegans*, also known as *Neanthe bella*). It is a small palm which eventually grows to a height of only 6 feet. Buy a palm the size you need, as growth is slow. It is very tolerant of low light. Palms prefer more humidity than most of us can give them, so you might need to set it on some rocks in a water-holding tray. For maintenance, keep evenly moist.

Always keep a watch on your houseplants for spider mites, mealy bugs, aphids and scale.

TIP: If there is a plant that you really like, but the light is too low, buy two, then you can swap them out.

Ortho Books "Complete Guide to Houseplants"

Lanaster and Biggs "What House Plant Where"

[Information on Snake Plants](#)

[Information on Cast Iron Plants](#)

[Information on Zeezee Plant](#)

[Information on Chinese Evergreen](#)

[Information on Pothos](#)

What Master Gardener Volunteers Do:

2018 Year End Review



In the Feature Article section of the December newsletter, several of the activities and programs that the Johnston County Extension Master Gardener Volunteers (EMGV) participate in were described. In this issue, I want to highlight the accomplishments and impact that the EMGV's had on Johnston County over the last year.

In 2018, a total of 59 Master Gardener volunteers donated 5911 volunteer hours, devoted 1037 hours to continued education, and traveled over 2328 hours to participate in meeting the needs of Johnston County residents. That's a total of 9276 volunteer hours and 1560 more hours than the previous year. A volunteer's time is valued at \$24.69, so their combined time value benefit to the residents of Johnston County is \$224,530.00! This doesn't include the dollar value in horticultural savings to professionals and consumers because of their education instruction, consultation, and advice in landscaping and gardening. Through our Customer Help Line, a total of 657 calls and people that walked into the Johnston County Center seeking advice, had their horticultural questions answered.

JC EMGV's were awarded a \$1000 grant for a Bees, Birds, Butterflies and Growing Pollinator Gardens symposium to be held on September 14th 2019. See informational links at the end of this newsletter. They also received a \$500 grant to partner with 4-H kids to create a Pollinator Garden on the Johnston County Center grounds within the coming year.

One of the ways that Master Gardeners reach the public is through our Mobile Plant Clinics as described by Sam Coburn, Johnston County Extension Master Gardener Volunteer. *"Throughout this past year (2018), 12 Master Gardener Mobile Plant Clinics have been available to the public at various locations in Johnston County (Hardware Stores, Clayton Farmers' Market, and the Clayton Harvest Festival). People of all races, gender, age, and ethnicity have benefited from the plant, soil, and garden knowledge communicated to them from Master Gardeners, Display Boards, and through North Carolina State Extension Fact Sheets."*

Johnston County was the first county to make the new NCSU brand identity changes to their Mobile Plant Clinic displays. Our New Master Gardening tent, NCSU table cover, and 7 new Educational Display Boards have helped lure folks who have an interest in their lawn or garden to the Plant Clinics. These changes have resulted in a 62% increase in customer traffic flow into the booth from last year. 439 people received landscape and gardening advice at a value of \$75 for each consultation, for a total value of \$32,925.00.

We are lucky to have many enthusiastic Master Gardener volunteers who have made our outreach efforts to the public a success. It is a wonderful feeling to have the opportunity to talk to others who have similar interests in plants, lawns, vegetables, fruit, soil, landscaping, and various garden problems. Both Master Gardeners and the Public have enjoyed memorable experiences at the North Carolina Extension Mobile Plant Clinics!

In addition to the other demonstration gardens that surround the Johnston County Center, a new Demo Vegetable Garden was installed with the financial and volunteer help of the Master Gardeners. Various extension agents utilize this garden to teach vegetable gardening, healthy eating, food preparation, propagation, and commercial vegetable and crop production. All the existing garden elements and soil were removed and replaced with taller easily accessible raised beds, a propagation cold frame structure, a large designated bed for field crops, an in-ground raised bed area for small fruits, and a patio with a bench.

Educational programs about vegetable gardening, have been used to teach Master Gardener volunteers and kids in the Jr. Master Gardener class. The Jr. Master Gardeners were able to harvest the crop, given hands on experience in preparation, and enjoyed tasting the results. The FCS and EFNEP agents have harvested the vegetables and utilized them in their healthy eating cooking demonstrations. Numerous tours have been given to Master Gardeners from other counties, garden clubs and individuals, and the field crop agents have used the garden as a crop evaluation tool and demonstration to area farmers.

In our efforts to provide educational programs to the public, Master Gardener Volunteer Craft Committee Chair, Silvia Caracciolo, says that *"We have a lot of fun, making crafts to sell at the Annual Plant Sale and other venues throughout the year, all the while getting to know each other and even teaching techniques to others that don't consider themselves artists or crafters! Cutting metal flowers, painting garden posts and signs, decorating bird feeders, and making mandala pots are a few of the things we have done. In the New Year we will be making cards, bird houses, and bee hotels to encourage pollinators. We use recycled materials to make most of our items. Generous donations from our Master Gardener group and those outside the group make our fundraising efforts a win-win that adds money to the Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program."*

Tiffany Whichard, a Master Gardener volunteer, and head of the Plant a Row for the Hungry (PAR) community garden, says; *"Thanks to the hard work and tireless dedication of our team along with various civic groups, youth, farm and office participants, Plant a Row for the Hungry, Johnston County was able to contribute over 3,500 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables to six different local food agencies. We're looking forward to 2019 and the continued impact we'll have on ending hunger in our community!"*

"The Clayton Community Garden was again very successful in 2018!" Roy Lewis, as head of this community garden says; *"The garden produced very well considering the unusual weather while surviving two hurricanes along with a wet growing season. Along with the volunteers of the JoCo Master Gardeners, the garden received help from many area organizations, both Girl and Boy Scouts and seed donations from the Clayton Woman's Club. The garden produced over 3000 pounds of fresh produce that was donated to Clayton Area Ministries (CAM) to help supplement fresh foods to the areas less fortunate populations. The Town of Clayton offers a 36-week Gardening A-Z educational course each Wednesday evening beginning in February thru October that is taught by the JoCo Master Gardeners at the Clayton Community Garden. In 2018, we taught 34 area residents the art of gardening in the Johnston County area. We've had several of these students become JoCo Master Gardeners after their experience of taking the A-Z gardening class! We look forward to a great 2019 and you becoming a part of the new class."*

Mrs. Ester Garner, chairperson volunteer of the Youth Committee, who works with the school gardens says; *"Currently several of our Master Gardeners have been working on programs within the schools. Four Oaks Elementary has a growing program supervised by energetic gardeners who work with elementary grades to introduce them to gardening and how good food helps them stay healthy. They give lessons on gardening and plant appreciation, organize plant beds which the students maintain and plant early crops to harvest so the students can watch their work from start to finish and even taste what they have planted."*

South Johnston High school usually has a fall and spring garden, but this year due to construction on our site, we only had a spring garden. There are two herb beds which are used yearly to season, taste and smell. We work with the Life Skills program at South Johnston with the help sometimes of some Agriculture students. We plan, prepare beds, plant, maintain, harvest and consume our garden. We even have flowers to appreciate and to help with pollinators."

Getting hands in the soil gives a whole new meaning to what we eat and we feel that learning by doing is an important part of eating healthy. Not to mention how we like to show off our gardens to the schools and staff."

Volunteer Sam Coburn describes his involvement with school gardens; *Lori and Sam work with kids who call themselves "The Green Kids" at the East Clayton Elementary School. "This fall the kids assisted with Fall Garden clean-up and planting garlic and California Red Poppy flower seeds. The school garden compost bin has been reactivated with horse manure, shredded leaves, straw and old compost soil to activate the compost pile with microorganisms. The Green Kids will be bringing their home vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, shredded paper and other organic materials to add to the compost periodically this winter. Topics discussed with the kids to help encourage interest in composting include: Organic Matter, Microorganisms, Soil Fauna, Carbohydrates (straw and shredded leaves, etc.) and Nitrogen rich materials (horse, rabbit, chicken manure, etc.) to*

feed the microorganism and soil organisms in the soil. Our future plan is to have a 2019 spring garden."

The EMGV program was created to expand NC Cooperative Extension Service's capacity to meet the needs of the gardening public by providing unbiased, research-based, environmentally sound information about establishing and maintaining gardens, lawns, landscapes, houseplants, fruits and vegetables in ways that protect health and natural resources. Enriched with training by NC State faculty and staff, EMGV's love and passion for horticulture along with their variety of lifelong experiences culminates to create highly effective community educators. Because of the efforts of these volunteers, Cooperative Extension can have a greater impact benefiting the citizens of Johnston County and beyond.

January Gardening 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.

Cool Connections:



Helpful Links from N.C. Cooperative Extension Johnston County

Additional Informative Links

Basic Steps for Home Landscaping

Carolina Lawns

NC Extension Gardener Handbook - Landscape Design

Growing a Fall Vegetable Garden

Upcoming Events:

Calling all Gardening Enthusiasts! Have you considered

becoming a Johnston County Extension Master Gardener Volunteer?



If you love to garden, enjoy the company of others with the same interest, have a desire to expand your scope of knowledge and like the idea of volunteering and making a difference in your community, then becoming a Johnson County Extension Master Gardener Volunteer is for you! All skill and knowledge levels are welcome! The only requirement is an enthusiasm for learning and a desire to be involved. Extension Master Gardener Volunteers expand Extension's capacity to meet the needs of the gardening public by learning to use and to teach research-based horticultural practices. All training and resources are provided by NC State faculty and staff to help you become a highly effective community educator providing the public with unbiased, research-based, environmentally sound information about growing lawns, fruits, vegetables, trees and ornamentals.

To learn more about Master Gardeners, go to <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/north-carolina-extension-master-gardener-volunteer-program-guidelines/ii-north-carolina-extension-master-gardener-volunteer-program>

The training starts on Thursday January 31st 2019. Classes will be held each Thursday afternoon from 1:30 to 4:30 for 15 weeks. Contact Horticulture Extension Agent Marshall Warren for more information at mhwarren@ncsu.edu. The fee for the course is \$150. The application and fee are due by January 4th, 2019.



Fruit and Nut Tree Pruning Workshop Demonstration

**February 9, 2019
10:00 am to 12:00 pm**



Blueberry & Grape Production & Pruning Workshop

**February 21, 2019
1:00 pm to 4:00 pm**

Future Events:

Birds, Bees, Butterflies and Growing Pollinator Gardens Symposium

September 14, 2019

N.C. Cooperative Extension of Johnston County Page



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.

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