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The Gardener's Dirt

Johnston County Center

March 2017

Feature Article

Turf Management

Phill Jones, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Rejuvenating an Established Warm Season Lawn in the Spring

If you have a warm season lawn, there are several important steps that need to be taken in early spring to ensure successful growth during the late spring and summer. In the new Master Gardener's Handbook (Chapter 9), there are detailed procedures for establishing warm season lawns and maintaining them. Rhizomatous - Stoloni ferous grasses continue to grow roots during dormancy. As a general rule, warm season grasses break dormancy when the ambient ground temperature is 80 degrees.



Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

The following steps should be taken to ensure the most attractive lawn for summer.

1. Irrigation - Water is essential to all plant life, but like anything else, care must be taken to keep from over-watering. Generally, warm season grasses are more drought tolerant than cool season grasses. They will go dormant during dry periods but need watering to maintain its best appearance.

2. Mowing - Warm season grasses tend to need less mowing and thrive best when mowed to a shorter height. It is important that your mower blades are sharp to avoid damaging your grass.
3. Fertilizer - Established lawns need about a pound of nitrogen per month, per 1000 sq ft during the summer.
4. Weed Management - Pre-emergent broad leaf herbicide should be applied in the early spring to prevent crabgrass and other weeds from infesting your lawn. Make sure you use selective herbicides to keep from doing unwanted damage to your lawn.
5. Aeration and de-thatching - There are several ways to de-thatch your lawn. The simplest way is to cut the grass as short (without scalping) as possible and hand rake. I use a coring roller to aerify my lawn and go over it again with the mower to cut the cores back to the ground.

Renovating an Existing Warm Season Lawn

1. When to Renovate - When your existing lawn has bare spots and/or areas of weeds, in the late spring to early summer.
2. The areas for renovation should be mowed as close to the soil as possible. You should apply fertilizer and lime after taking a soil sample.
3. You can use plugs for smaller areas or sprigs for larger areas.
4. Fertilize every four weeks with a balance blend to promote the spread until coverage is achieved.
5. Keep the areas where you have planted sprigs or plugs moist, with light sprinkling twice a day to speed growth and coverage.

Grow Native

Coastal Sweet Pepperbush, Summersweet, Clethra

Clethra alnifolia

Margy Pearl, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer



'Ruby Spice' - Photo Courtesy of JC Raulston Arboretum



Photo Courtesy of JC Raulston Arboretum

Writing this, I'm looking out at an oval, upright shrub with a rounded top. The fall leaf color was yellow to golden brown and it had spikes of fruit that turned into tiny brown seeds covering the shrub. They look like peppercorns, hence the name Sweet Pepperbush. The birds really like our Clethra and I do, too!

In the wild, this native deciduous shrub grows along stream banks, marshes, and even at the seashore. Our Clethra is thriving in a garden that stays moist, even through last summer, and will eventually reach about 6 by 6 feet. It can spread by stolons to form a colony and can be propagated by cuttings. There's no sign of new growth yet; Clethras tend to leaf out in late spring.

Our Clethra is cultivar 'Ruby Spice' with profuse, rose-pink blooms in mid to late summer. The parent species produces up to 6 inch spikes of white flowers. Both bloom on new growth and have an intensely spicy fragrance that gives it the name Summersweet. In late June through August, it will attract hordes of bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds!

Like most natives, it's low maintenance, disease and insect resistant when planted where it's stays moist, or even wet, in acidic, rich soil. My Clethra is in part sun, but through writing this I've found it can grow in sun to full shade. Hmm, we have a shady, rain garden area that just might be another place for this great native shrub!

Sources:

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/all/clethra-alnifolia/>

<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?kempercode=c230>

Good or Bad

Rose Rosette Disease

Tiffany Whichard, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer



This month I thought we'd touch on Rose Rosette Disease (RRD). It's a devastating and costly disease that causes unusual growth of stems--many call that cluster a 'witches broom'--along with other deformations. RRD is a systemic disease affecting all rose types (including Knockouts). What do I mean exactly by systemic? Well, it affects the bush as a whole.

Once the rose bush is infected, it will travel down the length of the plant and slowly kill it. When I say slowly, an average life of a rose following infection is about 2-3 years, but large established bushes have been known to remain alive for 6-7 years.

Unfortunately, there is no cure for RRD, so it's best to remove and destroy the plant, roots and all, as soon as possible. Scoop up the soil around the area too. And never, ever put that debris in compost. If you permit a rose sick with RRD to remain in your landscape, it will encourage the spread of the disease. Basically, as much as it may pain you to remove a beautiful plant, it is the absolute best thing you can do.



RRD is most often spread by a virus that is caused by a teeny, tiny eriophyid mite. If you are familiar with spider mites you know how little they are. Well, trust me, these are miniscule in comparison. As a matter of fact, a single eriophyid mite can't be seen with the naked eye. It measures less than 1/200th of an inch long. Beware that these mites seem to gravitate toward young foliage, so evidence of the disease may only appear on one cane first and then spread.

The earliest symptoms of RRD include red coloring

on the underside of leaf veins and excessive growth of shoots. These shoots will be more pliable than normal. Now, please, please, please know that all roses typically have a reddish coloring on new growth, so don't be alarmed if this is the only symptom you see! Your rose may not be infected.

Leaves infected by RRD may become crinkled and yellow and stems may get especially thick with an excess of thorns. In other instances, you may see dwarfed or stunted growth or aborted blooms. Symptoms can sometimes even mimic herbicide damage.

When you are shopping in nurseries or garden centers for roses, be sure to inspect the plants before buying, because RRD can also result from diseased grafts. Always use good practices when planting roses, making sure there is plenty of space between bushes, to allow not only sunlight and air circulation, but also to discourage the mites from moving from one plant to the next.

Quick Tip:

Reading Labels

Brenda Clayton, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Looking for a special plant for your yard this spring? Whether tree, shrub or flower, read that plant label. How big will it grow? When does it bloom? Where should you plant it - sun or shade? Will it take cold temperatures? What about water requirements? The plant label tells all! Don't ignore the basic information you need to give your new plant it's best home. Choose wisely, Spend wisely, plant wisely!



Photo Courtesy of Brenda Clayton



Photo Courtesy of Brenda Clayton

Landscape Horticulture

Landscape Design: Choosing Plants

Marshall Warren, Horticulture Extension Agent

In the January issue of The Gardener's Dirt, I wrote about the importance of landscape



Photo Courtesy of Marshall Warren

planning and site analysis. Continuing with this series, I will discuss how to choose plants for your design.

In review, you should make an inventory map of your property, identifying the conditions of your site, such as sun, shade, wet and dry areas, and documenting any problem areas, as well as potential areas for planting. Familiarity with your site's conditions will be advantageous in choosing the best plants that will thrive while creating your desired effect.

The next step is to sketch your vision on a landscape plan of your property and home. Decide on a formal or an informal design, and begin your plant design composition with the main structure plants, the large, mostly evergreen background plants and trees. Consider plants, lawns and hardscape features as you would furniture in your home. Arrange them to create spaces, focal points and views, garden rooms, direct traffic flow patterns, make changes in elevation, and create transition spaces. The second layer of mid-ground plants are for massing and infill. The final layer of plants, the foreground plants, include low growing plants, perennials, and groundcovers that provide emphasis and focal points.

Position trees and shrubs strategically to naturally cool or heat your home. Plant deciduous shade trees on the south, east, and west sides of a house to cast shade in summer and allow warming in winter. When planning a grass area, carefully consider which type of turfgrass is best for your site conditions and your desired maintenance level.

It's good to try to create year-round interest when choosing plants. In addition, don't forget to take into account what times of year different plants bloom, also consider other interesting features plants offer such as colorful and peeling bark, spring, summer and fall color, foliage texture, fragrance, pollinator friendly plants as well as fruit producing plants. Consider the different growth habits and form of plants, such as upright, cascading, rounded, weeping, spreading, mounding and vase shaped growth. Your goal is a garden that will be both aesthetically pleasing and functional.

Choosing plants can be an exciting endeavor, but resist the design mistake of over-planting. You want to avoid a crowded landscape and the need for future removal of plants you have grown to love. Also, avoid lawn areas scattered with trees and shrubs making the landscape look disorganized and maintenance nightmares such as planting large trees under utility lines, shrubs planted too close to the foundation and plant choices that grow too tall covering windows resulting in excessive pruning.

You may have heard the phrase "Right Plant, Right Place". Think about the future and take into account how the passage of time will affect the overall design. Consider the plant's growth rate, maintenance needs, and its eventual size at maturity.

The plants you select should be cold hardy in the appropriate climate zone. In Johnston County, we are in zone 7. A plant that is adapted to your hardiness zone is one that can tolerate the lowest winter temperature your zone usually experiences. To create and maintain a healthy landscape, choose plants that are suited to the conditions in your yard. Plants placed in a location that meet their requirements usually thrive without requiring a lot of attention. Learn the specific needs and growth habits of each plant before you buy them.

While you are out and about, pay close attention to plants in the landscape that are thriving and attractive that you would like to include in your landscape plan. Pay particular attention to its growing environment. If you don't know the name of the plant, take a photo and ask your local nurserymen, garden center, or extension office to identify it. Aim for diversity in your plant selections. Some people only consider native plants, but just because a plant is native, it still may have problems, especially if it is

placed in a location that does not meet its requirements. Sometimes, exotic plants are more resistant to pests than are their native relatives.

When searching for plants at your local garden center, ask for plants that are grown by Johnston County Nurserymen, or better yet visit your local Johnston County Nursery that offers retail to the public.

If you haven't already taken a soil test and delivered it to the extension office or to the NCDA&CS soil testing labs, go ahead and do so before you do any planting. Soil testing and soil preparation is the beginning step of having a good foundation for your new plants or maintaining your existing plantings. In the May issue of the Gardener's Dirt, I will discuss soil preparation. Stay tuned.

For eye-catching plants grown by Johnston County Nursery Marketing Association, ask for the "Choice Plant" Series - <https://jcra.ncsu.edu/horticulture/introductions-and-promotions/index.php>

Searchable Database of Plants - <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/>

Plants- NCSU Resources - <https://gardening.ces.ncsu.edu/plants-2/>

If you need to know how to take a soil test - see this link <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/a-gardeners-guide-to-soil-testing>

Learn about lawns - <http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/>

Monthly Garden Tasks

March Garden Tasks

LAWN MAINTENANCE

- The best defense against weeds is a healthy lawn. Learn how to care for your lawn throughout the year. Visit [TurfFiles](#) and click on Turf Tips to learn more about your lawn type. Keep it happy, healthy and weed free.
- Control existing weeds now, before they get large and/or set seed.
- For yards with an established weed problem, use pre-emergent herbicides to kill seedlings as they germinate. Pre-emergent herbicides can be used to control crabgrass and other broadleaf weeds. Pre-emergent herbicides should be applied while the forsythia is in bloom - late February to mid-March.
- Sharpen mower blades! A sharp blade cuts. A dull blade tears, making grass susceptible to diseases.



Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

TREES, SHRUBS & ORNAMENTALS

- Divide fall-blooming perennials that are overgrown, such as asters, primrose, irises, shasta daisies and mums. This is an easy way to enlarge your garden.
- Control leaf gall on azaleas and camellias. Leaf gall, a fungal disease, shows up as swollen leaves covered with a white powdery material. It is unsightly but generally not harmful to the plant. Pick off the affected leaves and dispose of them to avoid spreading the fungus.
- Do not compost diseased plant material.
- Remove protective winter mulch from tender perennials in early March to warm the soil and stimulate the plant to grow.
- Apply fresh mulch in April after perennials have emerged. Mulch helps with water conservation and weed control. <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-608.html>

Spring flowering shrubs and perennials come from this source: [Camellia japonica](#), [Camellia](#)

- Spring flowering shrubs such as quince, spirea, forsythia, azalea, Camellia japonica, Carolina Jessamine, viburnum, mock orange, weigela, Oriental magnolia and Indian Hawthorn flower on old growth. Prune them soon AFTER they bloom.
- Time for heavy, rejuvenation pruning of summer-blooming shrubs. Prune holly, Nandina and Beautyberry before new growth begins. Althea, Buddleia, Vitex, Crape Myrtle and Pomegranate can be pruned at the beginning of March to stimulate more flower production later.
- Prune roses before bud break. <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-641.html>
- For a better show next spring, let the foliage of spring-flowering bulbs die back naturally.
- Mulch or living ground covers are better choices under large trees. Ground covers act as "living mulch." Low-maintenance, shade-tolerant ground covers include pachysandra, periwinkle (vinca), ajuga (bugleweed), liriope and mondo grass. A 2"-3" thick layer of composted mulch conserves moisture, reduces erosion and provides nutrients to the tree. Keep mulch away from the trunk of the tree to discourage rodents and rot.
- Protect shade tree roots from injury. Remember that most of a tree's feeder roots are near the soil surface, under and just outside the tree canopy. If digging, foot traffic, or vehicles injure roots then damage to the tree can range from slowed growth (minor) to the death of the tree (major!). Some trees, such as dogwoods, are very susceptible to root damage; others, like maples, are more tolerant.

EDIBLES

- Plant cool-weather vegetable crops such as lettuce, mustard greens, sugar snap peas, radishes, onions, potatoes, spinach, and cole crops (such as cabbage and collards) as soon as soil can be worked. <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8016.html>
- If a ball of soil crumbles when squeezed in your fist, the soil is workable.
- Take a soil test to see how much fertilizer to apply around pecan trees. It's time!
- Beets, broccoli, cauliflower and Chinese cabbage can be started by the third or fourth week of March. Now is the time to start seeds indoors for vegetables such as tomato, pepper, eggplant, and others to get a jump-start on the summer growing season.

WILDLIFE & INSECTS

- Put up martin and bluebird houses by mid-March to encourage these birds to nest. For information on how to build bird houses for bluebirds and martins see link: <https://extension.umaine.edu/publications/7117e/> and <http://extension.missouri.edu/p/g9429>
- Clean out last year's birdhouse nesting materials to make them more attractive to house-hunting birds.

LANDSCAPE IDEAS

- Take photographs of your yard while your spring bulbs are blooming to help you remember where to plant more bulbs in the fall.

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](#)

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

[NCSU Pruning Trees and Shrubs](#)

[Cooperative Extension Search](#)



Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

Upcoming Events

The Johnston County Master Gardeners
Proudly Present Their Annual

Plant Sale



SAT. APRIL 22TH 2017

Extension Master Gardener
NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Natives, annuals, perennials, vegetables, herbs, house plants & more, all grown by JoCo's Master Gardeners! Also for sale, trees and shrubs grown by local nurseries, and a selection of handmade crafts & garden art.

Please Join Us!

8am - 1pm
Clayton Community Center
715 Amelia Church Rd., Clayton, 27520

Need For More Info?
Johnston County Extension
<http://Johnston.CES.NCSU.edu>

Proceeds Help Fund Local School Gardens & Community Outreach Programs

Johnston County Extension Master Gardeners Annual Plant Sale

April 22, 2017 from
8AM to 1PM
at the **Clayton Community Center**
715 Amelia Church Road in Clayton, NC.

Plants grown by master gardeners and local nurseries.
Garden art & crafts will also be available.

Mini classes : Butterfly gardening 9AM
Native plants 10AM
Square Foot Gardening 11AM
Growing Tomatoes 12Noon

Pesticide and Household Hazardous Waste Disposal Day-April 29, 2017

Need to clean out the barn, the chemical storage building, pantry, or underneath the sink? On Saturday, April 29, 2017, North Carolina Cooperative Extension in Partnership with Johnston County Solid Waste and the NCDA will hold a Pesticide and Household Hazardous Waste Disposal Day. The event will take place at the Johnston County Livestock Arena at 520 County Home Road in Smithfield from 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Acceptable items include old and unused pesticides, household cleaners, fluorescent (high TCLP mercury) lamps and bulbs from homeowners, and all types of household batteries i.e. Nickel-Cadmium, Lithium, Alkaline and Metal Hydride. In addition, we will be accepting oil base paint only from the public, but not latex. Oil base paint has a volatile organic odor and can only be washed-off with solvent, such as mineral spirits or kerosene. Latex paint, however, will wash off with water. If the label is still

mineral spirits or kerosene. Latex paint, however, will wash-off with water. If the label is still attached, it will indicate oil base vs. latex.

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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](#)