

NC STATE**EXTENSION**

Master Gardener | Johnston County

The Gardener's Dirt Newsletter

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Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

Feature Article

Birdhouses

By Silvia Caracciolo, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Location, location, location. Locating the home you have been searching for is the same for birds. Our birds look at the inside quite like we do. Will it meet the needs of a growing family, provide warmth for cold blustery days, and stay cool when temperatures are high?

So why do we need birdhouses? Development has led to a loss of habitat for nesting birds. Birdhouses can make a beautiful addition to your garden, serving not only as a decorative ornament, but also as a functional environment - especially when built with a specific species in mind. Birds need the same basic things people need - food, water, and shelter. Bird feeders and bird baths are perfect additions to allure the song birds to live on your side of the block. Be sure to install the nesting boxes away from feeders and baths. Sometimes predators may enjoy a seed or two and need a sip of clean water, and we don't want them to find a nest nearby.

The Audubon Society recommends using $\frac{3}{4}$ inch unpainted wood and recommends avoiding particle board or plywood. Consider using recycled wood as well! Like humans, birds want their houses to have a few essential things. The doorway needs to be a certain size. The doorway hole to the bottom of the nest needs to provide just the right distance for babies when they are ready to leave. This distance also prevents them from accidentally falling out. As steps provide access to your home, gouged areas in the inside of the house from the hole down to the babies provides a way for them to

work upward. Avoid perched posts outside the hole, as they only provide a convenient way for predators to make entry. Just as we like our heating and cooling, make small holes at the sides near the top of the bird house to help with ventilation. Bird houses should be installed by late summer or early fall. It is ideal to leave them up all year long to serve as roosting sites for migratory birds and shelter for winter. Make sure the birdhouse is the right height when installed. Most birdhouses should be ten to fifteen feet high, however, wren houses should be six to ten feet high. You would expect that facing the birdhouse toward your home would be the most optimum for bird watching. However, facing the bird house hole east or south east is the most successful. Our feathered friends prefer really quiet areas for nesting, and a good amount of shade. As long as it can get about twenty five percent sun, a shaded area of the lawn is an ideal spot. For your convenience, the house should also have an opening to be able to clean it out at the end of the season.

Birdhouses can be mounted on metal poles, four by four posts, on the side of a building, or even in trees. To prevent harming the trees, you can use wire covered with a rubber hose when securing your birdhouse. Mounting it directly into the trunk provides stability. There are many products on the market to keep predators at bay. An interesting one I discovered is called "Bird Guardian Birdhouse Tunnel". It is a tunnel protruding from the entry and allows only that size bird to gain access. Another product I saw in the gardens at the North Carolina State Fair is a nester cage. It contains nesting materials and all natural fibers. An interesting suggestion for attracting specific kinds of birds is to use bright colors, as certain species are attracted to particular shades.

- Red and Pink: Hummingbirds.
- Orange: Orioles, Hummingbirds.
- Yellow: Goldfinches, Warblers, Hummingbirds.
- Blue: Bluebirds, Bluejays.

You may want to decide what kind of bird you'd like to attract, and then check out the Cornell Lab of Ornithology web site for specific tips on placement for that bird. Good luck!

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/search/?q=All%20About%20Birdhouses>
www.audubon.org



Photo Courtesy of
Gardener's Confidence

Feature Plant

Distylium 'Blue Cascade'

(Grown and recommended by Johnston County Nurserymen)

By Marshall Warren, County Extension Horticulture Agent

The Blue Cascade® Distylium is an exciting new evergreen shrub

with cascading matte blue-green foliage that creates a layered effect as it grows making it extremely versatile and showy in the landscape. At a mature height and spread of 3-4 feet, it is a perfect replacement for some of the old standards especially in foundation plantings, hedges and borders. Its reddish-maroon flowers bloom in late January through March add interest during the winter months. With its heat and drought tolerance, it is the perfect plant to use as a specimen or grouping in any size garden. It makes an excellent addition to cut flower arrangements too.

Plant your Blue Cascade® Distylium in full sun to part shade. This evergreen shrub is adaptable to different soils, but performs best in a moist, well-draining soil. Once established, it is drought and deer tolerant as well as pest and disease resistant.



Photo Courtesy of
Tommy Bagley

Good or Bad

Composting

By Tommy Bagley, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

I seem to be a little crazy about recycling and composting. Our dear earth certainly needs both. To throw an egg shell in the trash is a crime. It does no good in the landfill somewhere but it sure helps my flowers. I don't even have to be out there every day turning it over, checking the temperature and fussing over it. If it takes a year to make a finished compost - Ok! No problem!

If I was fanatical I would be doing Vermicomposting! Hahaha! Worms doing the work, now, that is a really mega great way to have compost. Hopefully, I and many of you will start raising worms. Truly, I am shocked at the beneficial nutrients in Vermicomposting.

It's pretty amazing the variety of different compost bins we have devised along the way. There are many types of enclosed plastic bins. Another type is three homemade open wooden bins. I will talk about those in part 2.

I use a homemade compost waste/trash separator a EMGV friend loaned me. I call it waste but it's really just things like pieces of bark or a tree branch or something that has not composted property. The inside has a round screen which removes the large pieces of materials. Inside the bin is the beautiful ready to use compost. Black Gold!

In part 2 we will talk more about the technical parts of composting. Mixing the "green" portion and the "brown" portion. Things you can add to your compost and things you should not do. Happy Composting!



Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

Quick Tip

Prune Off Old Foliage

Before the new growth of liriopse and ornamental grasses emerge, be sure to prune off all the old foliage. On the liriopse, the old foliage will be green but the plants will look more fresh and healthy if this old foliage is removed. The ornamental grass foliage will be dead and the new growth will quickly regrow. If you want to have some fun next year when the ornamental grass foliage dies, you can spray paint the foliage to provide some temporary winter color in your landscape garden.



Photo Courtesy of Marshall Warren

Landscape Horticulture

Landscaping Matters to Consider in March

By Marshall Warren, County Extension Horticulture Agent

March is a good time to get your landscape garden ready for the arrival of spring. There are many things that you will need to do to tidy up your landscape and also some things that you may not have considered that will make your landscape flourish for many years to come. As I began to work in my yard this past weekend, I realized that there were several maintenance techniques I used that I can share to make your future landscape maintenance easier.

As part of the tidying up process, I raked up leaves that had nestled under shrubs, removed the dead leaves from emerging daylilies, cut back dead growth from perennials with the exception of my lantana. I will wait until the new growth appears before pruning, because leaving the dead limbs on lantana through the winter help it withstand cold temperatures. I also severely pruned back several overgrown shrubs to rejuvenate them. The new growth had just begun to emerge on them, but it is okay to do this type of pruning from the end of February into March. Take note that shortly after the new growth sprouts from these rejuvenated shrubs, and before you allow it to get tall and leggy, be sure to prune the growing tips back to encourage branching and define the shape. You can also do this type of heavy pruning in June.

To keep weeds under control in my landscape beds, I applied a fresh coat of mulch and then applied Pendulum, a granular pre-emergence herbicide. I made sure that the pre-emergence I used was safe for the shrubs and perennials in the landscape beds. This application should give good weed control for about 4 months. A good resource to see a listing of herbicide choices can be found in the weeds section of the book 2017 Southeastern U.S. Pest Control Guide for Nursery Crops and Landscape Plantings. See link: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/southeastern-us-pest-control-guide-for-nursery-crops-and-landscape-plantings/weed->

[control](#)

In other landscape bed areas where a few weeds were growing, I spot sprayed with a combination of glyphosate (Roundup) and the pre-emergence Prodiamine. I will rotate with different pre-emergence herbicides throughout the year to prevent resistance and to control weeds that the pre-emergence didn't control. I hand pulled weeds that were close to shrubs and perennials that I didn't want to damage with the spray mixture. Last year in areas where I wanted extended residual weed control and I didn't have to worry about certain plants, I sprayed a combination of glyphosate and a pre-emergence product called Sureguard (Flumioxazin) which will give me 4 to 10 months of residual control.

I also realized that some trees I had planted a few years earlier had not been structurally pruned. The ideal time to prune these trees was when they were first planted, but I didn't do as much structural pruning to them as I should. In structural pruning, only the parts of the crown that contribute to weakness are pruned in order to direct future growth into one leader. Structural pruning also slows branch growth rate of aggressive or long branches, and thins uncharacteristically dense clumps of branches high in the tree. With my Chinese Elm tree, I had to climb into the tree and prune out some limbs that were competing to become a central leader. I had to choose one of these central limbs to become the central leader. If I chose to let it go without structurally pruning, over time the branching structure of the crown would become weak and may split. See link to learn how to structurally prune.

<http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/structural-pruning-flash.shtml>

I have some container trees that I will plant soon and I plan to give these trees a good root pruning before I plant them. So, if you want trees that are healthy, have a long life, and not likely to blow over in a storm, then some pre-plant preparation needs to be done before you install new trees. This same principle also applies to container shrubs. To correct the problem of encircling roots from plants being grown in a container, shaving, pruning, or scoring the periphery of the root ball should be done with a hand pruner, digging shovel, hatchet, or other sharp blade. The new roots that emerge will be straight and venture out into the surrounding soil and not continue to encircle around the root ball. If these encircling roots were left in place, then as the tree trunk grows, these roots will girdle the tree and it will die or blow over prematurely. See link to learn how to cut roots at planting.

<http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/back-fill2.shtml>

When I plant these trees, I will be careful to not plant them too deep. I have seen many trees that lack vigor or suffer and die, because they were planted too deep. If you plan on installing some new landscape plants or you recently installed some, you may have planted them the same depth as they were in the pot, but the nursery that grew them may have planted them too deep in the potting soil. So, before you plant a new tree or shrub, be sure that you remove the top portion of the potting soil to expose the root

collar (the uppermost main horizontal mother roots) and find the point where the top-most root emerges from the trunk, and position the root ball slightly above the landscape soil surface. It is better to plant the tree a little high than to plant it too deeply. Remember to prune away any encircling or crossing roots and shave off the outside inch or so of the root ball. See link to learn how to correctly plant. <http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/summary-planting.shtml>

Even though the weather has fooled us into feeling like it is spring, be sure to do these end-of-winter maintenance tips for a successful landscape garden.

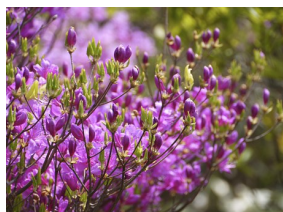


Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

Monthly Gardening Tasks

March Gardening Tasks

LAWN CARE

- 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.

TREES, SHRUBS AND 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.
- 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.
- 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), liriop and mondo grass. A 2-3 inch 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.
- 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 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

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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.



Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

Cool Connections

Helpful Links

[Read more»](#)



Upcoming Events

Johnston County Extension Master Gardeners Plant Sale
April 14, 2018 from 8AM to 1PM at Clayton Community Center
715 Amelia Church Road, Clayton, NC
Plants grown by master gardeners and local nurseries. Mini classes. Garden art crafts also will be available.

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