

NC STATE**EXTENSION**

Master Gardener | Johnston County

The Gardener's Dirt Newsletter

May 2018



Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

Feature Article

Container Gardens

By Beverly Futrell, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Intern

Containers are no longer just for houseplants! When it comes to container gardens, we are only limited by our imagination. These expressive gardens can range from formal planted basins to fun and quirky pieces in every shape and size. Whether we use containers to grow food or add visual interest, the possibilities are endless as these treasures can be tucked away in small, shady spots, in full sun, or indoors.

As more people tend to be moving to smaller yards, or even apartments with small patios or just those with sunlit windows, containers offer these small space dwellers the ability to grow fresh vegetables and herbs as well as surround their indoor spaces with fun little garden art pieces.

To grow vegetables inside, the unit will need access to at least 5 - 6 hours of direct sunlight each day to sustain the plants. Certain vegetable varieties are very conducive to this gardening approach - such as cherry tomatoes, leaf lettuces, spinach and other greens, green onions, radishes and herbs of all sorts. What's a better tasting or more healthy compliment to a nice meal than a fresh salad or fresh herbs. And, as with most successful projects, planning is key. "Regardless of the scope or size of your container garden, selecting the right containers, planting media, and plant combinations are the first steps on the road to success," writes Charles Mitchell, "Container Gardening." NC Cooperative Extension Franklin County Center. N.p., 7 Oct. 2014. Web. 13 Apr. 2018. <https://franklin.ces.ncsu.edu/2014/10/container-gardening-2/>. So, for any type of container gardening, do your

homework and understand the needs of the plants you want to use. In addition to the planting media, you must know the space requirements for each plant, how and when to water, when to supply the plant with additional nutrients, etc. Finally, select right vegetable plants for success as not all plants are conducive to indoor container vegetable gardening. Find ideas and information at "11 Best Vegetables To Grow On Windowsill/Windowsill Vegetable Gardening." Balcony Garden Web, 9 Apr. 2018, balconygardenweb.com/windowsill-vegetable-gardening-11-best-vegetables-to-grow-on-windowsill/.

Growing vegetables on a patio or in a small yard offers many more options as to plant selection as well as types of containers used for growing. Vegetables can be grown in pots or even terraced planters providing room for a wider variety of plant options and better yield. People are finding more ways to use vertical gardening and small greenhouses to increase output in small spaces. Additional ideas and information can be found in Chai, Julie "Urban Farmstead A California Couple Grows Their Own." Better Homes & Gardens, Mar. 2018, pp. 100-105. Photos Jessica Sample

Finally some of the newer trends in container gardening are using fun planters, plants and adornments as a way of introducing gardening to younger folks. My grandchildren are intrigued by small fairy and farm gardens. These types of gardens incite the imagination of youngsters all while they are learning to care for plants, learning about their garden's nutritional needs, when to water, how much to water, and how to groom their plants. <https://myfairygardens.com> is one such resource which provides various options and materials to get kids started. These same gardens can return the joy of growing something beautiful to an elderly shut-in person who may love a little beauty and something to care for. So consider starting containers to give as gifts of enjoyment to those you know.

Again, when it comes to options to grow in containers, the sky's the limit! We all need to find new ways to help "grow a greener world" and pass on gardening knowledge to ensure our communities and world remain a vibrant and healthy place. So whether it is with the elderly, a family or a child; find ways to become involved and help foster gardening interest in your small part of the world - one container at a time.

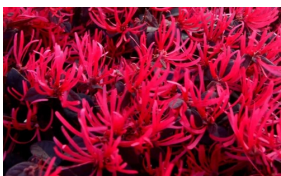


Photo Courtesy of
Keifer Nursery

Feature Plant

Dark Fire Chinese Fringe Flower

Loropetalum chinense 'Dark Fire'

(Grown and recommended by Johnston County Nurserymen)

By Marshall Warren, County Extension Horticulture Agent

'Dark Fire' has the deepest plum purple foliage color we've seen in a Loropetalum. The color lasts throughout the season unlike many cultivars that fade as the heat increases. 'Dark Fire' has nearly red spidery blooms that appear along its stems in spring and fall. Being in the

witch hazel family, this shrub is very deer resistant.

Winter hardy to USDA Zones 6b -9 where plants are best grown in rich, humusy, acidic, moist, somewhat gritty, well-drained soils in full sun to part shade. Best sited in sunny areas with some afternoon part shade. In areas where winter temperatures are likely to dip into the low teens, plants should be sited in locations protected from winds and given a root mulch. Mulch also helps plants retain soil moisture in summer. Plants generally produce best flowers and leaf colors in sunnier locations. Little pruning is needed other than what is necessary to maintain size and shape.



Photo Courtesy of
Katie Maynard

Good Or Bad

Protect Your Earthworms From This New Planarian Predator

By Katie Maynard, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Last summer I noticed these horrible critters near my driveway underneath pots or pieces of wood. Then I checked in my backyard and they were there as well. Conspicuously absent were my usual plethora of earthworms.

After some research I identified them as *Bipalium kewense*, a very long land planarian. They may be as long as 24" long. The anterior end ("head") is expanded in a transversal semilunate shape with a dorsal color of light-brown with five black to grey longitudinal stripes. The median and marginal stripes are narrow and black, very distinctly marked. The lateral stripes (between the median and marginal stripes) are usually grey, broad and with diffuse margins.

Bipalium kewense is believed to be native to Southeast Asia, but currently is found worldwide. It was probably introduced by international plant trade, as it is frequently found associated with plant pots.

B. kewense is a known predator of [earthworms](#). To feed on its prey, a flatworm extends its pharynx out from its mouth on the mid-ventral portion of its body and secretes enzymes that begin digestion of the earthworm external to the flatworm. The liquefied earthworm tissues are sucked into the branching gut of the flatworm by ciliary action. The [digestion](#) seems to be at least partially extracorporeal by means of a [collagenolytic enzyme](#).

Bipalium kewense is known to produce [tetradotoxin](#), a [neurotoxin](#) that results in paralysis. It is possible that the toxin aids the planarian in subduing its prey as well as in protecting it against predators.

All species of *Bipalium* are hermaphroditic, but *Bipalium kewense* has rarely been observed using sexual reproduction as a primary means of reproduction. Asexual [fragmentation](#) is the primary means of reproduction in *B. kewense* in temperate regions.



Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

Quick Tip

Potting Soil vs Gardening Soil

By Silvia Caracciolo, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

The potting "soil" used to grow container plants is really not soil at all. Most potting soils you buy in a garden center are comprised of the basic ingredients: peat moss, pine bark, and either sand, perlite or vermiculite. Most soilless potting mixes are free of insects, diseases, and weeds and are ready to use immediately.

Whereas soil is a mixture of organic matter, minerals, gases, liquids, and organisms. An ideal gardening soil ratio for plant growth contains 50% porespace, with the porespace filled with equal parts air and water, 45% mineral matter, and 5% organic matter.

The difference between gardening and potting soil is in the ingredients, and each one is designed for a different use. When used in a container, field soils often retain too much water, have too little pore space (for oxygen), are too heavy, and potentially harbor harmful diseases, insects, and weeds. Because of these drawbacks, field soils are no longer used for growing plants in containers and even mixing in a small portion into a potting mixture is not recommended.



Photo Courtesy of
Daniel Boone Gardens

Garden Visits

Daniel Boone Native Gardens

By Margie Pearl, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

On a perfect leaf peeper day in our spectacular Blue Ridge Mountains, my husband and I visited Daniel Boone Native Gardens in Boone. Although the bloom was somewhat past peak, it was still uniquely beautiful! Many native plants were added to my wish list and with the help of a horticulture student, I also collected seeds to see what could be propagated back home!

Open during daylight hours May to October, the gardens began as a project of the Garden Club of N.C. Inc. It was to serve as an education, preservation and conservation effort to nurture rare or endangered North Carolina native plant species in a natural landscape. Located next to the Horn In the West outdoor theater, the three-acre public garden opened in 1963. Designed by Asheville landscape architect, Doan Ogden, more than 200 species of NC native trees, shrubs and wildflowers comprise the rhododendron grove, bog garden, rock wishing well area, fern garden, vine-covered arbor, and a rock garden. The historic Squire Boone Cabin is featured near a pond. Daniel Boone VI, a

descendant of famed American frontiersman Daniel Boone, forged the wrought iron gates at the entrance.

Annual events include the Early Bird Wildflower Walk and Plant Sale in April, Flower Photo Stroll in June, and other events throughout the season. Tours are self-guided, although gardeners are often available to answer questions. Admission is only \$2, ages 16 and up!

See the stunning garden photos of Dr. Annkatrin Rose, botany course teacher for Appalachian State University Biology Department!

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/blueridgekitties/sets/72157624573986932/>

See even more native NC plants in a natural, spectacular setting on the trails below the bridge and in the zoo area at nearby Grandfather Mountain.

<https://grandfather.com/>

Visit NCSU's list of public gardens in North Carolina!

<https://gardening.ces.ncsu.edu/public-gardens/>

Use an interactive map to find the numerous, unique gardens throughout NC. YOUR visit to the site helps keep it active as one of the top 2 listings under NC Public Gardens!

Resources:

<https://danielboonenativegardens.org/>

<https://www.themastfarminn.com/daniel-boone-native-gardens/>



Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

Monthly Gardening Tasks

May Gardening Tasks

LAWN CARE

- Don't fertilize cool-season turfgrass (fescue, bluegrass). It has been growing actively all winter, and it will begin to go dormant as summer heats up. Let it slow down naturally, and it will be better able to withstand the heat and drought of summer. Call for a Lawn Maintenance Calendar for your type of turf. It tells you how to care for your lawn month by month - such things as fertilization, mowing and watering.
- Most of the weeds you see now are winter annuals. The time to control these was last August. In a couple of weeks, the weather will be too hot for these winter annuals, and they will start dying. Don't waste your time and money to spray them with herbicide. The best thing to do is mow them before they produce and spread seed. Put it on your calendar to spray for them in August.
- Warm-season grasses such as Bermuda, Zoysia or Centipede can be planted now. Mow cool-season grasses, such as Fescues, at a height of 3- 3 1/2 inches to help them survive hot, dry periods.

TREES, SHRUBS AND ORNAMENTALS

- Pinch your plants. Use your index finger and thumbnail to break

out the lead growth at tips of branches. Pinched plants have shorter, sturdier stems, more lateral branching and more blooms. Pinch back mums, zinnia, salvia, cockscomb (celosia), petunias, marigolds, snapdragons, and garden phlox.

- It's time to plant summer beauties such as gladiolus, dahlias, caladiums, cannas and all those colorful bedding plants.
- Dead or diseased limbs on woody ornamentals should be apparent by now. Prune them out.
- Stake floppy plants, such as peonies, dahlias, and Boltonia (Michaelmas daisy), while they're small so they'll have support when they need it. After plants have grown large, they are difficult to stake.
- Cut roses properly. Removing too much wood and foliage when cutting flowers can seriously weaken your rosebushes, especially during the first year. Leave 2-3 well developed leaves (groups of five leaflets, not three) between the cut and the main stem.
- Grow great bearded iris by giving them excellent drainage, fertile soil, sunshine, and beds free of competing weeds and grass. Divide frequently (in August) for larger and finer blooms.
- Prune spring-flowering shrubs after they bloom. The best time to prune azalea, rhododendron, forsythia, spirea, flowering quince, kerria, pieris, and weigela is just as flowers begin to fade. Don't wait till summer, or you'll cut off next year's flower buds. To keep your shrubs ever young, prune one-third of the oldest canes back to the ground each year.
- Prune wisteria frequently throughout the summer to control vegetative growth and get better blooms next spring.
- Keep dogwoods healthy. Spot anthracnose and powdery mildew are two major disease problems that show up on dogwood trees in late spring and summer. To help dogwoods overcome diseases keep them watered, maintain soil fertility, and clean up fallen leaves to minimize the spread of the disease.
- MULCH! Prepare for dry summer weather and control weeds at the same time by using a layer of mulch 2-3" thick.
- Banish bermudagrass (wiregrass) from your planting beds. Keep it pulled to prevent it from overrunning your garden.
- Plant seeds of annual vines such as moonflower, scarlet runner beans or passionflower. Mix plants with the same growing requirements in your container gardens. Do not mix sun-loving and shade-loving plants together in the same container.

VEGETABLES & FRUITS

- Plant veggies now that the soil is warm and the danger of frost is past. Sow seeds of beans, squash, cucumbers, and corn. Set out transplants of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and okra.
<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/central-north-carolina-planting-calendar-for-annual-vegetables-fruits-and-herbs>. Pinching also works well for many vegetable plants, including tomatoes and peppers.
- Watch for slugs. These soft, slimy, slender pests have a special taste for tender young crops. Holes in leaves or on the leaf margins and a silvery slime trail in the morning indicate a slug feast the previous night. Slugs hide under boards, stones or debris

during the day.

- Train and support tomatoes, pole beans, peppers and eggplants. Side dress sweet corn when it is knee-high.
- Make consecutive plantings of beans over a few weeks to extend your harvest.

LANDSCAPE IDEAS

- Plant vegetables in your flowerbeds! Eggplant, pepper varieties, and cherry tomatoes make colorful additions to the garden. Bush beans and climbing beans have attractive foliage and charming small flowers. Vegetables can also mingle with flowers in pots on a patio or deck.
- Welcome back hummingbirds! Females will be in the area first; the males will follow soon. Salvias, honeysuckles, penstemons, and other tube-shaped flowers, especially red ones, will attract hummingbirds to your garden. Fill feeders with a solution of 1 part sugar to 4 parts water. Wash feeders and replace the food at least twice a week.



Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

Cool Connections

Helpful Links

[Read more»](#)



Photo Courtesy of
NCEMGVA

Upcoming Events

Food Preservation and Canning Series

Johnston County Agriculture Center
2736 NC Hwy 210
Smithfield, NC

June 2nd, 2018- Jams, Jellies, and High Acid Foods

June 9th, 2018- Low Acid Foods

July 28th, 2018- Dehydrating and Freezing

August 11th, 2018- Fermentation

For more information: <https://johnston.ces.ncsu.edu/2018/02/food-preservation-and-canning-series/>

2018 NCEMGVA Conference

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC!

Greenville Convention Center
303 Greenville Blvd SW
Greenville, NC

June 7, 8 & 9

For more information: <https://ncemgva.org/>

Jr. Master Gardeners Camp

For ages 10-14

Johnston County Agriculture Center
2736 NC Hwy 210
Smithfield, NC

July 2, 3, 5 & 6

Explore Exciting new foods, exotic plants and tropical fruits and veggies. Discover ways to recycle in the garden and get goofy with photosynthesis! Learn about wildlife in the garden as well as the basics of vegetable and fruit gardening.

To sign up in the 4-H system: <https://nc.4honline.com>

Read more N.C. Cooperative Extension news»



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.

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.