

# **NC STATE** EXTENSION

## Master Gardener | Johnston County

### The Gardener's Dirt Newsletter

November 2017



Photo Courtesy of  
Marshall Warren

#### Feature Article

##### Ways Master Gardeners Volunteer

By Joanne King, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Many people are familiar with the Johnston County Extension Service, and with the Extension Master Gardener Volunteer program. To become a certified volunteer, a master gardener attends classroom training 3 hours per week for 13 weeks, passes an exam, and performs 40 hours of volunteer work. Many of the trainees perform volunteer hours concurrent with the classes, to aid in the importance of learning by doing.

Our goal as Master Gardeners is to educate the community and provide information based on scientifically proven methods in the area of home horticulture. Home horticulture encompasses vegetable gardens, flower beds, shrubs, trees, lawns and any other elements affecting the home landscape. Here is what we do to meet our goal.

**Demonstration and Community Gardens:** We plan, maintain and promote several demonstration gardens at the Agricultural Extension Service building on Highway 210 in Smithfield, including labeled plantings in landscaped areas, a Choice Plants garden, and a Bee Hotel. We also offer a community vegetable garden at the Clayton Community Center on Amelia Church Road in Clayton. Residents can attend gardening classes at the center and get hands-on experience in the garden. We also sponsor another vegetable garden located at Johnston Community College in Smithfield called Plant a Row for the Hungry (PAR). Every Thursday morning, PAR volunteers and two local youth groups work in the garden. Both community gardens provide thousands of pounds of fresh produce to local food ministries.

**Plant Clinics:** We offer public outreach to the community at various locations and times, such as Lowes Home Improvement, Hudson's Hardware & Outdoor Equipment, and the Clayton Farmers Market. We answer questions, offer written information to homeowners, and assist with plant selection. We also assist with

horticulture inquiries at the NC State Fair, the Southern Ideal Home Show, and the Clayton Harvest Festival.

**Information Line:** We staff the telephone at the Extension Service several times per week, and respond to questions, return calls left on our voicemail, and answer questions that come to us via email. Our telephone number is 919-989-5380.

**Youth Programs:** We sponsor gardening programs at several county elementary schools, including East Clayton, Four Oaks, and South Smithfield, and at the Clayton Community Garden. There is also a Junior Master Gardener program that is held in the summer.

**Printed Material:** We produce our award winning monthly newsletter, The Gardeners Dirt, and provide articles to various local publications as requested.

**Training and Outreach:** In addition to our Master Gardener training, we offer training workshops open to the public throughout the year. These events are highlighted in our monthly newsletter and our website,

[http://www.ncstategardening.org/extension\\_master\\_gardener/johnston/index\\_county](http://www.ncstategardening.org/extension_master_gardener/johnston/index_county).

In the past, we have covered topics like Weed Identification and Control, Pruning Techniques, Fire Ant Control and Deer Management. We also provide a speaker to local gardening groups as requested. And we often visit a resident's home to assist with problems that cannot be addressed without seeing the problem.

**Plant Sale:** We have an annual Plant Sale, usually in late April, which is our primary source of income for our programs. Most of the plants are propagated from our own gardens. We also sell select shrubbery and flowers from local nurseries. Our goal is provide a wide choice of plant material with an emphasis on native plants, pollinator plants and plants that thrive well in our area.

I am sure I have overlooked something. We have over 50 volunteers now which allows us to keep expanding our programs and our outreach. Check out the website above or follow us on Facebook at [Johnston-County-NC-Extension-Master-Gardener-Volunteers](#).



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## Grow Native

Native Carolina Cherry Laurel

*Prunus caroliniana*

*(Grown and recommended by the Johnston County Nurserymen)*

By Margery Pearl, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Have you been looking for plants that bloom in late winter? Starting as early as February and often lasting into April, this evergreen has showy white, fragrant flowers that can be used in arrangements. If you're looking to create or enhance your own wildlife paradise, the flowers have a high level of nectar to attract bees and insects and the striking black seeds in the fall and winter will bring in the birds. A surprise awaits the gardeners if the glossy leaves are crushed; they smell like maraschino cherries!

**Size:** Can reach 20-40 feet and 15-35 feet wide.

**Growth Rate:** Moderate to rapid.

**Form:** Dense, pyramidal shape when young will gradually become more rounded.

**Site:** Sun to partial shade; moist, well drained soil.

**Landscape Use:** Can be used as a single ornamental or as a low maintenance natural hedge.

**Advantages:** Deer resistance, salt tolerant, and drought tolerant after establishment.

**Propagation Methods:** Seeds, Semi-hardwood Cuttings, Softwood Cuttings.

**Where to purchase:** A more compact variety called Bright 'N Tight and the regular variety can be purchased from our local JoCo Nurseries or garden centers.

**Caution:** Plant parts and seeds are poisonous to humans and livestock!

**Resources:**

[https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id\\_plant=PRCA](https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=PRCA)

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/all/prunus-caroliniana/>

[http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/treesandpowerlines/prunus\\_caroliniana.shtml](http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/treesandpowerlines/prunus_caroliniana.shtml)



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## Good or Bad?

### Weed and Soil Indicator Plants

By Tiffany Whichard, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

As a child, I loved finding clumps of oxalis in my Grandmother's otherwise immaculate yard. I was positive that if I only looked hard enough, I would eventually find a four-leaf clover. Now, as a home owning adult, weeds are a little less magical to me.

Did you know, though, that dandelions and other unwelcome weedy interlopers can actually tell you something about the health of your lot? Yes, just like flowers or vegetables prefer certain types of conditions to grow in, the spotted spurge spidering its way across your front slope can actually give you a good idea of your soils needs and the limitations you may have. By using this knowledge, you'll have a better idea about what may thrive your yard or what changes you may need to make.

My disclaimer here, of course, is that a simple soil test from the Johnston County Agriculture Center (which is free for part of the year and a nominal charge the rest of the time) will give you the most accurate picture. If you're not sure how to take a soil sample, please ask us. We'll be glad to walk you through the process--it's really simple!--and we can supply you with the needed boxes and forms.

My second disclaimer is that some weeds aren't super particular. They don't all favor a certain kind of soil. Some will plant themselves anywhere that has been recently tilled. Others may crop up in the vacant spots of your vegetable or flower garden, simply because they are getting ample sunlight, along with an oasis of water and nutrients. Keep in mind, weeds that you see in well-established areas, like your lawn, are probably the strongest indicators of what problems or opportunities that you may have.

Dandelions and mullein, for example, thrive in "sour" soils. Sour soils mean that it is acidic, with a pH below 7.0.

If you are finding these on your property, chances are you could grow great azaleas, blueberries, hydrangeas and rhododendrons. If this is not what you had in mind to grow, you can change your soil's pH over time by applying a pelleted lime, sometimes called dolomitic limestone. I promise you this is not as scary or confusing as it sounds. You can buy this stuff by the big bag full at home improvement stores. This breaks down over several months, when it rains, and slowly brings up your soil to

more neutral territory. Again, the soil test through the Ag Center can tell you exactly how much lime (or whatever amendment is required) to spread and you would just follow the recommendations outlined in your results.

Let's look at a few more and then if you have any questions, you are welcome to call us.

- \* Whorls of delicate Carpetweed are commonly found in sandy patches.
- \* Curly Dock is a sure indicator of wet or swampy areas.
- \* Clumps of plantain can indicate you are battling clay, poor soil or heavy compaction.

The bottom line is that you have the capability of changing your soil over time or you can choose to work with what you've got. By using the information provided to you by the soil test, combined with regular observation, it'll help you to pick plants that are best suited for you and your lot. This will take a lot of frustration out of gardening and, ultimately, save you a bunch of money. And isn't that what we all want?



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## Quick Tips

### Recycling Kitchen Waste

By Chris Alberti, Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

Keep a covered bucket under your kitchen sink to store vegetable scraps such as banana peels, coffee grounds and filters, tea bags, crushed egg shells, rotting fruit, etc. Empty bucket periodically into a composting area and mix with leaves, grass clippings, healthy plant clippings to make a good composted soil. If you are not in the habit of periodically dumping your bucket, you could store your kitchen vegetable scraps in a large zip-lock bag and freeze. When the bag is full or several bags accumulate, you can add the contents to your compost pile. Avoid adding meat, bones and fatty foods to your compost pile.

Resource: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/backyard-composting-of-yard-garden-and-food-discards>



Photo Courtesy of NC State

## Ask An Expert

### An Invasion of Kudzu Bugs!

Info provided by Mike Waldvogel, Extension Specialist - NCSU Entomology

*I've got thousands of these olive-green bugs about the size of a fat lady bug all over my house and when I mash them they stink! What are they and how can I get rid of them?*

Mike Waldvogel, Extension Specialist with NCSU's Entomology Department describes this problem as an invasion of the Kudzu Bug.

Kudzu bugs are 4 to 6 mm long (about 1/6" - 1/4"), somewhat oblong in shape, and olive-green colored with brown speckles. They are "true bugs" and so they have piercing-sucking mouthparts. Aside from kudzu, these insects are known to feed on a wide variety of legumes (soybeans and other bean species, as well as wisteria).

Large numbers of kudzu bugs are a nuisance in and around structures in both spring and fall. As temperatures and day length decline, kudzu bugs seek out sheltered areas where they can pass the winter, such as under bark or rocks, or in leaf litter, etc. Homes near soybean fields or patches of kudzu are more likely to be invaded by the kudzu bug in the fall. The bugs will often congregate on light-colored surfaces. They will then move under siding, or into gaps around doors and windows, or through penetrations such as around air conditioning and water pipes.

Their body secretions produce a foul odor and can stain fabrics and wall coverings. Directly handling and crushing kudzu bugs can cause staining of the skin and even blistering and moderate discomfort in some sensitive individuals.

If kudzu bugs are active in and around your home, targeted sprays around windows, door frames, and soffits may provide some benefit, though these are often best made by professionals who have access to more effective application equipment and products.

Although most common household insecticides will kill the bugs on direct contact, control of the kudzu bug by treating the exterior of homes is likely to produce poor-mediocre results for several reasons. First, most people do not have the proper equipment to apply an insecticide to areas high up on their homes where the bugs may congregate. Second, because the insects are actively feeding even in the fall, their movement out of these plantings may take place over several weeks which means several applications (e.g., weekly) may be needed to try to reduce their numbers. Common home-use products contain "pyrethroid" insecticides (look on the product label at the "Active Ingredients" and the chemical name likely ends in "thrin") such as permethrin, bifenthrin, or lambda-cyhalothrin. When using insecticides, always read and follow the directions for use on the product label.

Pesticides have limited ability to stop the bugs from entering homes. So, it is also important to seal gaps and openings (such as around plumbing and AC lines) to prevent the bugs from entering the home. Vacuum up the insects and then place the vacuum bag (or contents) into a trash bag and freeze the bag for several days. You can also drop the bugs into soapy water to kill them. If you simply dump the live insects outdoors, they will likely end up back inside or surviving somewhere else around your property.

The insects are fairly mobile (they crawl and fly) and so even eradicating (or attempting to eradicate) kudzu in or near your yard may not solve the problem.

**Resource:** <https://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/Urban/kudzubug.htm>



## Monthly Gardening Tasks

### November Gardening Tasks

LAWN CARE

● Fertilize fescue lawns for winter. The November fertilization (near Thanksgiving) is the most important one of the year for cool season grasses. The soil is still warm enough to permit the growth of strong roots that will enable the grass to withstand next summer's baking heat. Use a slow-release fertilizer formulated for turf, and apply according to soil test results. Soil samples are free this month. Kits are available at the Johnston County Extension Office.

- Check out the Lawn Maintenance Calendar. <http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/>

#### GENERAL REMINDERS

- Clean up and throw away any diseased plant material. Do not compost! Leaving infected leaves, fruits, nuts on the ground or on the plants provides a source of inoculum for re-infection next year.
- Use shredded leaves as mulch. Fallen leaves contain lots of nutrients, but they decompose slowly. Help the process along by shredding or mowing them.
- Compost your yard waste! As you cut back your perennials in preparation for winter, return that bounty to your garden in the form of compost. Compost is nature's favorite fertilizer and soil conditioner. Recycle grass clippings, leaves, and non-diseased garden refuse.
- Put the garden to bed for the winter. Pull out all annuals that have completed their life cycle and cut back perennials.

#### TREES, SHRUBS & ORNAMENTALS

- Fall is for planting! September through early February is an ideal time to plant deciduous trees/shrubs and perennials. Plant evergreen plants from September - November. The cool weather permits establishment of a root system before next year's hot weather. Find pictures of recommended planting techniques at: <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort>
- Allow space for plants to grow to their mature size. A common mistake is placing a large or fast-growing plant where there is not enough room for its full height and spread. The error results in continuous pruning in an attempt to keep the plant to a size nature never intended it to be. Find out how large the plant can be expected to grow, and place it where it can fulfill its potential.
- It's time to move shrubs from one place to another.
- Mulch shrubs/trees, perennials & herbs after the 1st killing frost for winter protection. Apply a 3" deep layer. Mulch comparisons and general info: <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort>



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## Cool Connections

### Helpful Links

[Read more»](#)



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## Upcoming Events

[Annual Fruit and Nut Tree Sale - October 2 - November 30, 2017](#)

[Become a Master Gardener](#)

[Read more N.C. Cooperative Extension news»](#)



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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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