

The Gardener's Dirt Newsletter

October 2019

Feature Article:

Very Versatile Vinegar

By: Jyl Burgener, Johnston County Extension Master Gardener Volunteer



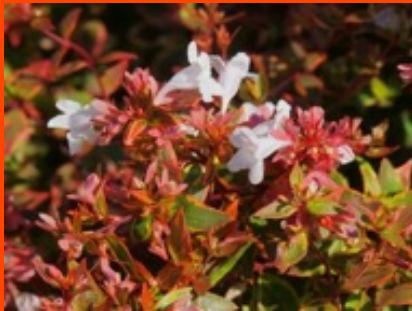
White Distilled Vinegar (a weak acetic acid) has so many practical uses in and around the house and garden. By using white vinegar in your gardening endeavors instead of other chemicals, you will lessen your contact with harmful chemical residues and dramatically reduce your out-of-pocket expenses.

Sometimes less is more. Use white distilled vinegar for the following applications:

1. **Disinfectant** - a spray bottle of vinegar can be used to spray your pruner blades between plants to minimize the spread of plant viruses and bacteria which can cause plant disease. It kills the microbes by lowering the pH.
2. **Bug bite relief** - when you are bit by those hateful fire ants or other irritating insects, just spray the body area bitten with vinegar. It will sting slightly but soon afterward, the irritation from the bug bite goes away.
3. **Weed killer** - add 1 gallon of vinegar, 2 cups of Epsom salt and ¼ cup of Dawn dish detergent (to act as a surfactant) to your weed sprayer. Mix well and spray your weeds, and in a couple of sunny days, the weeds will begin to die. Note: This is a water soluble solution meaning that you need to apply it on sunny (NOT RAINY) days as it quickly breaks down. The fact that it is water soluble and non-toxic to pets and children is a wonderful benefit and also means this weed killer can be used in your vegetable garden. Keep in mind that vinegar will only kill annual weeds and not perennial weeds.
4. **Cut Flower Extender** - to keep cut flowers lasting longer, I used to put them in a sugary drink such as 7 UP or add 2 aspirin to water. Now, I use a packet of sugar and two (2) Tablespoons of vinegar combined with water in the vase to keep those flowers "perky" for a bit longer.
5. **Salt and Mineral Stain Remover** - Over time, most clay and ceramic pots will develop white salt or mineral stains from fertilizers and hard water. To easily remove these stains, just spray with vinegar and rinse with water. If this does not remove the stain, add a Tablespoon of vinegar and mix with salt to form a paste. Rub the paste on the stain, wait 15 minutes and then wipe or rinse off the paste. This should do the job.
6. **Blackberry Stain Remover** - I have blackberry bushes and if I don't wear gloves, I often get blackberry stains on my fingers. If I spray my fingers with vinegar, the stains will wipe off easily. It saves my hand the abrasive scrubbing which was how I used to remove the stains. This will work for other berry stains, but I have only used it for my blackberries (blackberry stain is so darn visible).
7. **Fruit and Vegetable Cleaner** - Add one part vinegar to 3 parts water in spray bottle. Spray fruit and vegetables to lessen or remove bacteria and surface pesticide residue. Rinse with water after vinegar spray or it will leave a vinegar taste.
8. **Puppy Carpet Stains** - Although this is not a garden use, the first time I started to use white vinegar was when I was house training my first puppy. Using a 1:1 vinegar: water solution, I would apply this to carpet spots where my puppy peed. Not only would it take up the stain but it would eliminate the urine odor which I believed helped the puppy realize the inside of my home was not its personal toilet. By staking a rag outside that I had used to clean up an accident, I was able to encourage the puppy to rightly understand that indeed the outside was its personal toilet!

Feature Plant:

Abelia x grandiflora 'Ableops', 'Sunshine Daydream' Glossy Abelia (Grown and recommended by Johnston County Nurserymen Association)



'Sunshine Daydream' Abelia is a more compact growing shrub than other Abelia cultivars, growing to a height and spread of 3 to 4 feet that requires little pruning. It boasts an elegant mixture of purple stems and tricolor evergreen foliage that emerges dark pink with green and white variegation and as the season progresses, the foliage softens to light pink with golden yellow and green hues. Its pollinator-attracting fragrant white flowers emerge in spring and persisting into fall they eventually turn a rose-pink color. 'Sunshine Daydream' Abelia is ideal when planted in full sun to partial shade in shrub borders, foundation plantings, and used in container gardens. With its colorful evergreen foliage, fragrant flowers, deer resistance, heat and drought tolerance, and providing year-round interest - "What else would you ask for in a shrub?"

Quick Tip:

Planting Trees and Shrubs

By: Barb Barakat, Johnston County Extension Master Gardener Volunteer



Fall planted trees establish better than those planted in the spring

Dig the planting hole 3 times the diameter of the root ball with gently sloping sides, and no deeper than the root ball. The plant should never be planted deeper than it is in the original pot and with trees, the trunk root flare placed just above the soil grade. Planting too deep is a common mistake. Trees and shrubs that are planted too deep may quickly die or may linger for several seasons, but never really thrive.

For shrubs, backfill with a mix of native soil and compost, and for trees, just backfill with the native soil, stopping ½ way thru to water - this gently settles the soil around the roots.

Create a large mulched area around plant by adding a 2+inch depth of mulch up to within 2" of the stem but not touching it.

Water well . . . it's new, so check it daily - water well as needed (probably every other day).

Water plants when the root ball feels dry. Apply water slowly to allow it time to soak in and moisten the root ball and surrounding soil.

NCSU Video series on correct tree planting:

Tree Planting Introduction - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWYgA-MESyE&list=PLoDIM1Hxaj9q-d9XtPokJned6lXmBYYVs&index=1>

Tree Planting Container - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nbe0s6QJ3Y&list=PLoDIM1Hxaj9q-d9XtPokJned6lXmBYYVs&index=5>

Charlotte Glen. <https://chatham.ces.ncsu.edu/2017/09/fall-is-the-best-time-to-plant-trees-and-shrubs/> (for the full article)

Ask an Expert:

Pumpkin & Winter Squashes

Preservation & Food Safety

by Cassidy Hall, Johnston County Family & Consumer Sciences Agent



Fall is my favorite time of year- temperatures and humidity decline and my favorite foods are in season! I am a sucker for roasted winter vegetables and pumpkin pie. The one thing I dread about this time of year is the increase in unsafe home food preservation activities.

Many things can be found on a store shelf that are not safe to can and preserve at home. Because commercial settings have equipment and additives to can and jar-seal products, consumers assume they can make their own version at home. Pumpkin butters and winter squash purees are fairly popular, but they should not be canned using home food preservation techniques. Why not? Well, there are a variety of reasons.

Pumpkins and winter squash have a pH of 4.6 or higher, which qualifies them as a low-acid food. Low-acid environments are perfect for encouraging the growth

of bacteria that can lead to the growth and reproduction of pathogens. One particular pathogen of concern is *Clostridium botulinum*. This pathogen thrives in an oxygen-free environment, such as a sealed jar that has undergone the canning process. In a low-acid, oxygen-free environment, *Clostridium botulinum* pathogens create heat-stable toxins. Ingesting even a small amount of these toxins can lead to Botulism. Botulism is a rare, yet the most expensive, form of foodborne illness. A single dose of the anti-toxin costs the Centers for Disease Control \$80,000 per dose. Botulism begins by degenerating or paralyzing nerves and can lead to facial paralysis, drooling, and drooping eyelids. As Botulism becomes more severe, it makes its way to the diaphragm and can lead to death.

Now you might be questioning the fact that low-acid foods, such as vegetables and meats, may be pressure canned at home, so why can't pumpkin and winter squashes? You're on the right track. Foods with a pH of 4.6 or higher are considered low-acid and must be pressure canned unless they are acidified, such as the case of pickled cucumbers or pickled okra. It's more than the pH that matters. Viscosity is critical to the ability of heat to penetrate to the center of the jar. In addition to the lack of acidity in the product, squash and pumpkin purees are simply too thick to allow for proper heat penetration to safely pressure can. There is also the consideration of water activity. Water activity is the amount of moisture freely available to pathogens. Jams and jellies are pretty moist, but there is lots of sugar and gelatin to make the water unavailable to pathogens. That is not the case with a puree, or pumpkin butter, as there is not enough binding of the water to make a safe and shelf-stable product.

It sounds like I am giving you bad news, but keep in mind that you can always freeze purees and pumpkin butters, and you can also keep pumpkin butters in the refrigerator. Another option for preserving pumpkin and winter squash in a way that is shelf-stable is to cube the pumpkin and squash and then pressure can the food. With this idea, it is important to follow a tested and researched recipe exactly. This includes following recommendations for the size of the cut, the preparation (cooking instructions) of the food, processing time, and the canner method. An approved recipe can be found here

(https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_04/pumpkin_winter_squash.html).

For questions about food safety and preservation, please contact Cassidy Hall at 919-989-5380 or via email (cassidy_hall@ncsu.edu).

Fall Vegetable Garden Cleanup Isn't a Veggie Tale

by Roy Lewis, EMGV



Remove dead plants and weeds



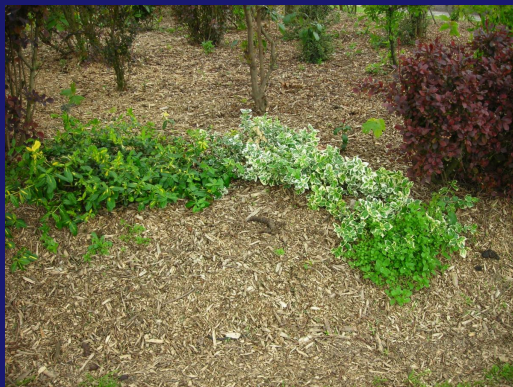
Record plantings in garden journal



Take soil sample



Add fresh compost



Add two inches mulch to prevent winter weeds



Clean, sharpen, and organize garden tools

Finally, fall has arrived bringing shorter, cooler days and a new set of gardening tasks for new and seasoned gardeners alike. Making the effort to keep a tidy, weed free vegetable garden throughout the growing season is a wonderful cultural practice. However, as the hot, dog days of late summer persist and the harvests decline, it is human nature for all of our gardens to become neglected. Weeds, disease and harmful insect pests seem to thrive during those hot, humid late summer days in eastern North Carolina.

The biggest mistake we might make in growing vegetables is not taking the time to promptly give our gardens a thorough fall cleaning and then preparing our soils for the upcoming growing season. Now is the time to stop next season's gardening problems and increase your vegetable production. Let's explore requirements and tips that are essential to long term garden health that will surely make our gardening experiences more fulfilling!

As your vegetable plants become diseased or are spent, remove them from the garden area as soon as possible. Dispose of any obvious diseased plants or rotting diseased fruits as well as most plants in the nightshade family making sure that they aren't added into the compost bin. All cucurbit plants should also be properly disposed of due to mildew/fungal diseases. Remove as much of the spent plant root ball as well as any weeds or grasses that may have been missed and properly dispose of them as well. Avoid adding weeds or contaminated plants to your compost bin. These plant materials may spread weed seeds and diseases that may survive during the winter affecting future crops as many compost bins never reach a constant 150 degrees. A record or journal entry of plantings should be kept so proper crop rotation practices will be observed in the coming years. You should take and submit soil samples by October 15th of each year to insure that you have adequate time to make any necessary pH or nutrient adjustments to your soils.

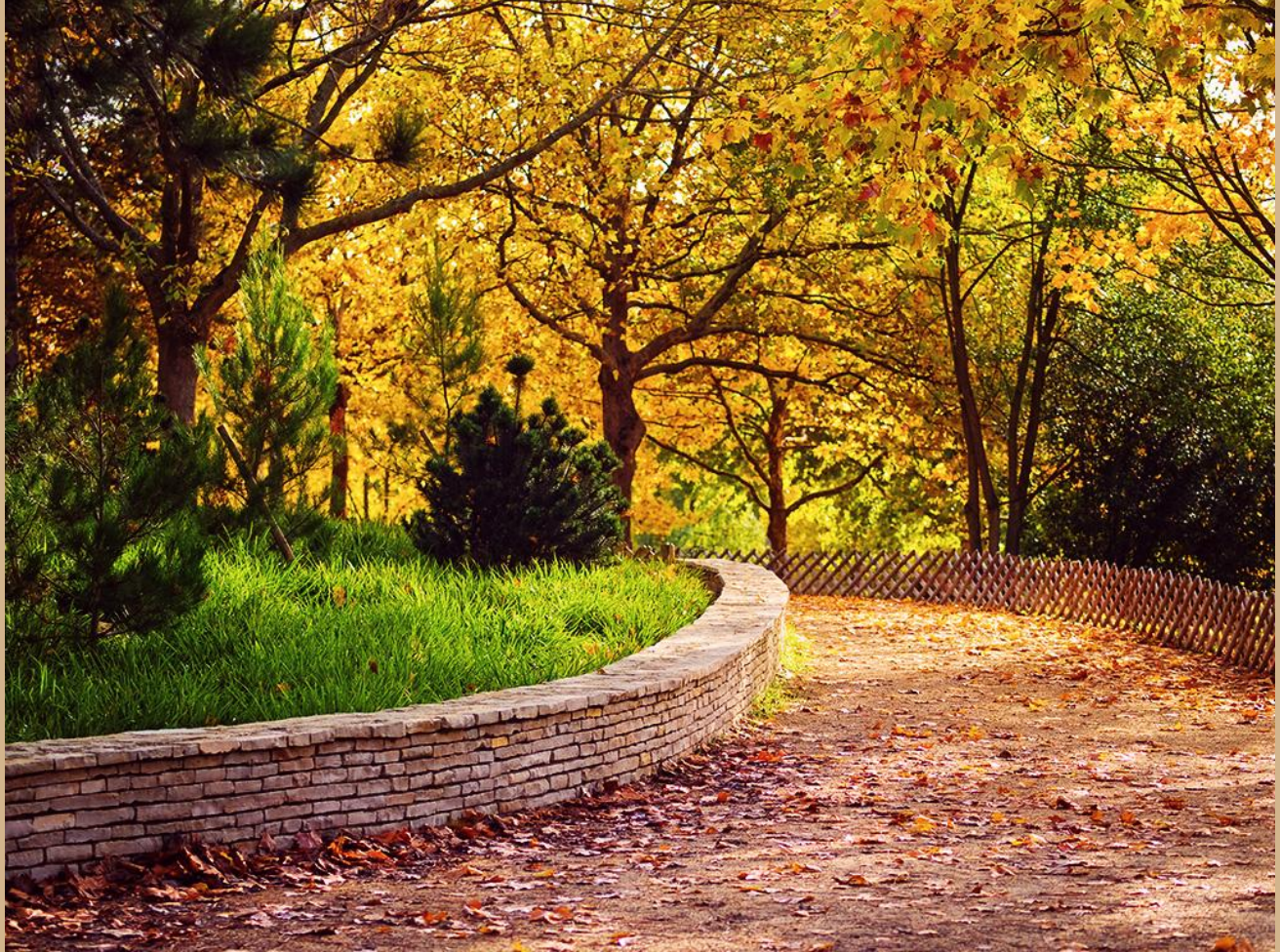
At the first killing frost, perform a final thorough cleaning of dead plant materials and properly dispose of them. At this time, many gardeners choose to add one or two inches of fresh compost as well as needed macro/micro nutrients, lime or gypsum as needed per your soil report. Lightly scratch these amendments into the existing substrate to bolster your soil quality. Two inches of clean leaf mulch or seedless straw may be added to prevent winter weeds but don't over mulch to prevent insulating buried pests or diseases from freezing to help eradicate future crop contaminations. You may choose a winter cover crop to hold soils or deter diseases as well. After the ground freezes, additional mulch may be added or a landscape cover may be stretched and secured over the beds to prevent winter weeds and protect newly prepared soils from erosion.

Finally, clean, sharpen and sanitize your tools for the winter. Mowers and mechanical equipment should be cleaned, serviced and winterized in anticipation of the upcoming gardening season. Properly store your tools in a garden shed or garage to prevent rust or deterioration. Quality tools are a must and with proper care, they will last for many years to come.

For additional information with hands on demonstrations, you may wish to attend the A-Z Gardening classes offered at the Clayton Recreation Center/Clayton Community Demonstration Garden or contact the JoCo Master Gardener Hotline @ (919) 989-5380.

Remember, fall planning and organizing your garden allows you to complete the yearly cycle thus mastering your creative gardening efforts. As spring emerges, you'll be ready for the new growing season and your journey towards fresh nutrient rich foods will enable you to achieve a more self-sufficient lifestyle sooner than you may think. Happy Gardening!

October Gardening Tasks:



GENERAL REMINDERS

- **Fall is for planting!** Autumn is an ideal time to plant or transplant deciduous trees/shrubs and perennials. Fall is also a great time to till the soil and add organic material and lime. The bed will have plenty of time to "mellow" before next spring. Turning over the soil also exposes harmful insects such as grubs to predators and cold temperatures.
- **Collect soil samples for testing.** Test your lawn, flower beds and vegetable garden. Testing should be done every 2-3 years. The kits and analysis are **FREE** this month. Strong healthy plants start with proper soil pH and fertility.
- **Clean up and throw away any diseased plant material.** Do not put it in a compost pile. Leaving infected plant material on the plants or on the ground provides a source of inoculum for next year's infection.
- **Improve your clay soil by loosening the soil and adding well-rotted compost** in a ratio of one-part compost to two parts soil. Mix compost in well, making a bed 8-12 inches deep.
- **Use shredded leaves as mulch.** Fallen leaves contain lots of nutrients, but they decompose slowly. Help the process along by shredding or mowing them, preferably with a bagger attachment.
- **Compost your yard waste!** As you cut back 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.
- **Wait to prune trees and shrubs.** Pruning before dormancy may induce tender, new growth that will not have time to harden off before the first frost.

- Take cuttings of begonias, coleus, geraniums, and impatiens to root and grow indoors during winter.
- Remove bagworms from evergreens to greatly minimize their population numbers for next year. The eggs for next year's caterpillars are in the bag.
- Trigger roses into dormancy by no longer deadheading spent flowers and allow rose hips to form.
- Purchase spring-flowering bulbs and store them in a cool place until chilly weather sets in and you can plant them. Daffodils, Spanish Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides hispanicus*), and Snowflakes (*Leucojum aestivum*) are bulbs to consider. By contrast, tulips and Dutch hyacinths decline after their first season in Johnston County and are best treated as annuals.
- Store tender tubers, such as dahlia, caladium, gladiolus, geranium, and tuberous begonia, which may not overwinter in the garden. Lift roots, tubers, or corms about the time of our first killing frost, just after their foliage dries. Dig deep enough so that the roots will not be snapped apart when lifted from the soil. Leave soil around dahlia tubers, canna, and caladium roots. Store tubers inside in a dry, cool, frost-free place such as a basement to protect against rodents. Geraniums can be overwintered in pots, or bare root in paper bags until soil dries and falls away from plant. Shake soil off roots and tubers, and cut away dried stem. Discard any plant parts that show soft spots or disease. Place tubers and roots in old sawdust or peat moss in a flat box or plastic bag with holes for ventilation.
- Coddle Holiday Cactus - Leave your holiday cactus outdoors in a spot that gets a few hours of bright sun and no light after dark. Give it regular water and fertilizer. The combination of attentive care, bright daytime, and long, dark nights sets the stage for heavy flower bud production in early winter.

LAWN CARE

- Check out the [Lawn Maintenance Calendar](#) for your grass and learn how best to care for it.

Click on each type of grass for link to maintenance schedule:

[Bermuda](#) [Centipede](#) [Zoysiagrass](#) [St. Augustine Grass](#) [Tall Fescue](#)

- Pamper newly seeded fescue lawns. Baby grass plants have very small, shallow roots. Keep them watered. Don't let falling leaves smother them. Use a leaf blower on low power or rake very gently so you don't uproot the tender young plants. If desired, bermuda lawns may be overseeded with annual rye at a rate of 5 lbs./1000 sq. ft.
- Avoid cool season weeds by applying the appropriate pre-emergent herbicide to plant beds and turf areas that had cool season weeds last year.
- If you didn't do this in September, help prepare your centipede lawn for winter by applying 1 lb. of potassium fertilizer per 1,000 ft². Use 0-0-50 or 0-0-60. Do not use fertilizer that contains nitrogen.
- To control annual bluegrass and other winter annuals in your warm season lawn, apply a pre-emergence such as Simazine. Follow label directions.

VEGETABLES & FRUITS

- Plant a cover crop in your vegetable garden. Legumes, such as clover and alfalfa, will enrich the soil by fixing nitrogen. Cover crops prevent erosion and can be turned over to decompose in the soil and provide needed organic matter.
- Plant a fruit tree or small fruit. The ideal time to plant is December.
- Keep pecans picked up. Weevil larva for next year's populations will crawl out of the nuts and overwinter in the soil if the nuts are not picked up.
- Build a cold frame to plant cool-weather vegetables for a longer harvest into early winter.

Cool Connections:



Crabtree Falls, NC

Helpful Links from Johnston County Cooperative Extension

****NEW* Cool Connections - Gardening Resources for ALL!***

Basic Steps for Home Landscaping

Carolina Lawns

NC Extension Gardener Handbook

Vegetable Gardening: A Beginners Guide

Upcoming Event:

The Annual Fall Fruit & Nut Tree Sale

2019, Sponsored by
Johnston County Cooperative Extension Advisory Council

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Bryant Spivey at 919-989-5380 or by email bmspivey@ncsu.edu.

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