



## Coming Events

### Workshops and Demonstrations

- Thurs., Apr. 9, 10:00a  
*Vegetable Gardening 101*
- Sat., Apr. 18, 8:00am-1:00pm  
*Household Hazardous Waste Disposal Day*  
100 Stone Quarry Road, Haw River
- Thurs., Apr. 23, 10:00a  
*Totally Tomatoes*
- Thurs., May 7, 10:00a  
*Perennials with Carol Kawula of ACC*
- Thurs., May 21, 10:00a  
*Pollinator Gardening with Natives*
- Thurs., Jun. 4, 10:00a  
*Rainwater Catchment*

All classes will begin in the auditorium at the Agriculture Building and are free unless otherwise indicated. Registration is required. Call 336-570-6740, or register online here: <http://alamance.ces.ncsu.edu/>

### Contact us :

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## Grow Your Own

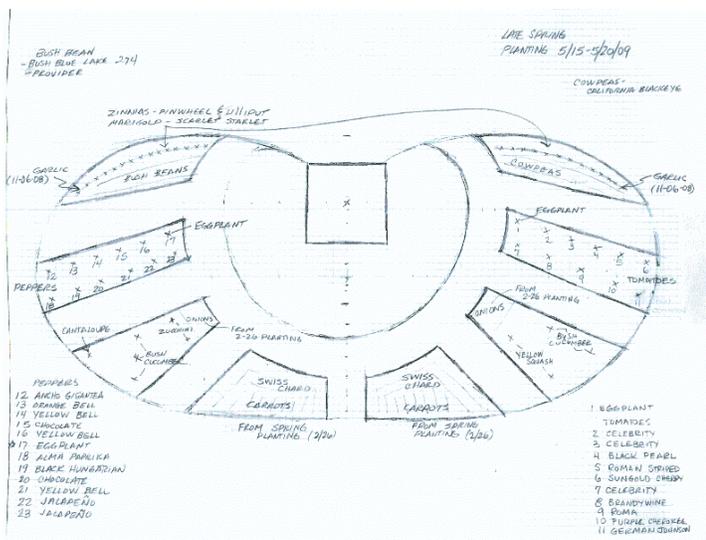


I don't know about you, but I am tired of winter. I have studied the garden catalogs looking at new vegetable varieties as long as I can. I had hoped to plant an early spring garden, but it was either too cold or too wet. Since I have a small garden space I'll just wait a little bit longer and plant my summer garden. I know it is hard for some folks to wait and they may start planting too early. Tomato plants are already in the garden stores and it seems like it is time to get into the garden. You do need to remember that we can still have temperatures in the 20's the first two weeks of April. If you decide to plant early in order to have ripe tomatoes before your neighbor, you need to be prepared to cover your plants in the event of frost.

If you are new to vegetable gardening, there are some things you need to consider before starting your garden. Selecting a garden site is very important to the success of your garden. Be careful not to start with too large a space. If you are over ambitious when starting your garden you may soon get overwhelmed with work and lose interest. The average size family garden should be only 640 square feet (20' X 32'). If you are a first time gardener, a 200 square foot garden will provide plenty of produce without a tremendous time commitment. Many vegetables can be successfully grown in containers on your patio or deck.

# Homegrown Tomatoes! ...and Squash and Beans and Melons and...

There are several other factors to consider when planning your vegetable garden. The most important factor is the amount of sunlight your garden spot receives. Six hours of direct sunlight is necessary and eight to ten is better. Some vegetables tolerate shade better than others. Broccoli, collards, kale, parsley, and lettuce are more tolerant of shade than root and fruit crops like potatoes and tomatoes. The garden should be planted away from trees, buildings, and shrubs. Good air drainage is important. Try to avoid low spots at base of hills. Low spots warm up slowly in the spring and are prone to form frost pockets in the fall.



The general recommendation is to take a soil test every three years, but I prefer to take a soil sample every year. Once the pH has been corrected you should not need to apply lime every year, but you will probably need to apply some nitrogen. It is important however to not apply too much nitrogen as that will cause poor fruiting in vegetables like tomatoes and squash. The soil test will give specific recommendations for the proper amount of fertilizer to apply. The pH for most vegetables is 6.0 to 6.5 and it is best to apply lime several months before planting if possible and till the lime into the soil.

Here's a link to a Vegetable Gardening publication from NC State you might find useful:  
<http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/home-vegetable-gardening.pdf>

Select the vegetables you want to grow and draw a diagram of the garden site. This plan will ensure you have a good variety of produce without too much of any one vegetable. Keep this plan for the future so you can avoid planting related vegetables in the same location more than once in three years. This crop rotation helps prevent the buildup of insects and disease problems, which will reduce the need for pesticides.

The ideal garden soil is a good loamy soil that is fertile, deep, easily crumbled, well drained, and high in organic matter. Unfortunately most of us don't have that kind of soil.

Heavy clay soil can be productive with the addition of some type of organic matter. A 3-4 inch layer of well-rotted leaves, pine bark fines, or compost tilled into the clay soil will improve the drainage and aeration of the soil. Cover crops planted in the fall and tilled into the garden in the spring will help improve the soil. Green manure crops like wheat or ryegrass make good cover crops.



If you have any questions about vegetable gardening or any other gardening topic, please give me or Chris a call.



## April Garden Tips

Shape up evergreen shrubs now, but avoid shearing, if possible. Shearing, especially in spring, encourages dense growth on the outermost part of the plant leaving interior branches shaded and leafless. Hand prune from within, cutting back the longest shoots to a point where they join a main branch. Use a different technique to prune stringy *Nandina domestica*. Cut the longest canes close to the ground. New canes will come up from the base to give this old-fashioned garden staple a fuller look and a place in your modern garden.

Begin spraying fruit trees with a home orchard spray as soon as the flower petals fade. Never spray with a product that contains an insecticide while the blooms are still being visited by bees.

Now is the time to begin to fertilize your warm season lawn (Bermudagrass or zoysia) Apply ½ pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet. Repeat the application in June and August. A soil test will help you determine if your soil needs any adjustment to phosphorus,

potassium and/or pH levels. Contact us for information—soil testing is free from now until December 1st.

Fertilize established roses when new growth is approximately 2” long. Susceptible plants should be on a regular spray program to control fungus diseases. If you’re a rose lover but hate the thought of adhering to a spray schedule, consider planting one of the many disease-resistant shrub roses. Call the Cooperative Extension Office for recommendations – 570-6740.

If yours is a cool-season lawn, mowing season is here! Set your mower blade high; at least 3 inches, preferably 3-1/2. Try not to take more than one-third of the blade off when you mow. This may mean mowing more than once a week this time of year.

Leave grass clippings on the lawn! They return nutrients to the soil and reduce the need for additional fertilizer. You can reduce the amount of nitrogen you add to your lawn by as much as one-third if you recycle!

After danger of frost is past – around April 15th – plant seeds of sweet corn, pole beans, lima and snap beans, cantaloupe, cucumbers, summer squash, pumpkins and watermelons.

Wait until the end of the month to plant tomatoes, peppers and eggplant. These do best when night temperatures are a little warmer; closer to 50 degrees.

Divide, repot and fertilize houseplants before moving them outdoors for their summer vacation at the end of the month. Remember to set them in the shade, at least at first, then introduce them gradually to the sun. After all, they just spent the winter in the relative darkness of your home

When selecting summer annuals, look for short, bushy plants with green leaves, well-developed root systems and more buds than flowers. Tip one out of the cell to check for healthy white roots.



Free again!



## *Arbor Gate Plant of the Month*



### Vanhoutte Spirea

### *Spiraea x vanhouttei*

This shrub may be a little old fashioned, but in my humble opinion, *Spiraea vanhouttei* \* is a definite upgrade from the *Spiraea prunifolia*—Bridalwreath spirea. It is a hybrid cross between *S. trilobata* x *S. cantoniensis*. Beginning in mid April, Vanhoutte's graceful, arching branches are covered with thousands of frilly white umbellate clusters, each of which is comprised of dozens of 1/3-inch flowers. Following the flowers, the graceful branches sport small attractive, blue-green leaves that persist until November when they assume shades of purple, red and orange before falling.

Typically growing 5-8 feet tall with a spread of 7-10 feet, Vanhoutte spirea has few pest problems and is tolerant of drought and just about any soil type except constantly wet. For best flowering, grow in full sun to part shade. Little pruning is required, but you may want to thin every few years by cutting some of the older branches to the ground after flowering.

Learn more here:

<http://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/all/spiraea-x-vanhouttei/>

\*The specific epithet honors Belgian nurseryman, L. B. Van Houtte (1810-1876).

