



Coming Events



Thursdays are for getting things growing with Cooperative Extension!

Thurs., Feb. 14, 10am

Grapevine Pruning with Andy Zeman

Thurs., Feb. 21, 10am

Fruit Tree Pruning

Thurs., Mar. 14, 10am

Pruning Woody Ornamentals

Workshops are FREE, but please call to register:

Contact us :

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Extension Service

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A Christmas (Tree) Story

When I was young, I didn't really appreciate growing up in a small town. It seemed that everywhere I went there was somebody who knew who I was. More importantly they also knew who my parents were. I always (well mostly) tried to be on my best behavior because I figured somebody was watching and would tell my folks if I misbehaved. Now that I am older, I have a greater appreciation for living in Alamance County. It is very interesting to me to discover how the people and places are all connected. I'm sure you are wondering where I'm going with this story, but give me a little time and I'll pull it all together.



Sometime around 2001 or 2002, Rett Davis planted a spruce tree at the Agriculture Building that was decorated every year for Christmas. Unfortunately it had gotten too big for us to decorate for the past couple of years so it had lost its original purpose. It also was planted in an area that soon will become our new hardy tropical plant garden. So now we have a problem.

A Moving Experience



Tim decided the best use for the tree was to dig it up and plant it at Graham's Town Hall where it could be enjoyed for years. This was no small task considering the tree is about 16 feet tall and would need a root ball around seven feet wide weighing close to 6,000 lbs. Since I have known Tim for a number of years, when he said he wanted to transplant the tree, I knew it was as good as done. The tree was moved on a Tuesday, decorated on Wednesday and ready for the Christmas tree lighting ceremony that Saturday evening. Our spruce tree now has a new home thanks to our community connections.

~Mark

The spruce is too big to decorate and doesn't fit the hardy tropical theme, but is a really nice tree. Chris and I pondered on how the tree might be used. We didn't want to cut it down and haul it off to the landfill. We thought about cutting off the branches and making some decorative spruce roping, but that just wasn't practical. Our next thought was that it might be a great outdoor Christmas tree for some local organization. Here is where the connections start to come together.

We put the word out to our Master Gardener volunteers that our spruce needed a new home. Ruby Manning, one of our MG volunteers, also volunteers at the Alamance County Arts Council. When it was determined that the Arts Council couldn't use the tree, they passed the availability information on to Melody Wiggins at Graham Recreation and Parks.

Melody was very interested and brought Tim Covington, Graham's Property Maintenance Superintendent, along to look at the tree. Now we had thought all along that the best possible use for the spruce was for a cut Christmas tree, but Tim had a better idea.





December Garden Tips

Living Christmas trees need to be kept cool and well watered. As soon as possible, move your tree back outdoors and plant it. Cut trees need special care, too. Before bringing the tree indoors, make a fresh cut of at least ½ inch off the bottom. Set the tree in plenty of water and keep the container filled – freshly-cut trees drink more water than you may imagine! Artificial trees require only that you dust them a little if they have been up since last Christmas.

Beautiful holiday decorations as close as your own back yard? Evergreen shrubs and trees such as holly and boxwood may be pruned without harm to the plant this time of year and the greenery can really ‘spruce’ things up. Take advantage of grapevines’ running habit by taking cuttings now to coil into decorative wreaths. Make the grapevine decorations as soon as possible after cutting, or the vines may become too dry and brittle to handle.

Branch out from your poinsettia routine with kalanchoe, gloxinia, amaryllis or cyclamen.

These beauties, like poinsettias, need bright, indirect light and hate wet feet. Keep plants away from cold drafts or excessive heat and water sparingly.

Overwatering is the biggest cause of premature houseplant death in December. Check your plants carefully to be sure the soil is dry before watering and hold back the fertilizer until spring.

Keep bird feeders clean and filled with seed and suet. Change the water in birdbaths at least once a week and keep them ice free.

Begin planting asparagus this month. Choose rust-resistant male varieties such as Jersey Giant or Jersey Gem. Select 2-year-old crowns for quick harvest.

While you’re digging the trench to plant your asparagus, collect soil from your garden and lawn area to submit for soil testing. Call the Alamance County Cooperative Extension Service for instructions on soil testing: 336-570-6740.

Take time now to assess your garden successes and near misses in 2012. Even if you had your best garden ever; jot down what went right and make plans for next year. When the garden catalogs begin to roll in the end of this month, you’ll be ready to dream!

Fertilize pansies and other hardy annuals now and remove spent flowers. Apply a layer of mulch to prevent frost heaving.

Take inventory of your leftover and saved seeds. If the seed has been stored under cool, dry conditions, you can expect a good stand of healthy seedlings as follows: Seeds one year old or less: onions, parsley, parsnips and salsify. 2 years: corn, okra and peppers. 3 years: beans, southern peas and peas. 4 years: beets, fennel, mustard, pumpkins, rutabagas, squash, Swiss chard, tomatoes, turnips and watermelons. 5 years: Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, eggplant, muskmelons, radishes and spinach.



Arbor Gate Plant of the Month



Acer palmatum ‘Sango-Kaku’ Coral Bark Japanese Maple

A coral spark in the winter landscape. A splash of chartreuse in early spring. A flash of fire in autumn. Three seasons of brilliance and a bright green summer; this is the story of *Acer palmatum* ‘Sango-Kaku’, the Coral Bark Japanese Maple.

A relative newcomer to Arbor Gate Teaching Garden, our Sango-Kaku is blazing into its second winter here having added nearly a foot of new growth since it was planted 18 months ago.

Eventually, this Japanese Maple should be around 20 feet tall with a similar spread. You may want to prune the twiggy growth to better display its graceful canopy.



Plant in a well-drained soil with plenty of organic matter. Plantsman Michael Dirr writes, “Minimal attention will reward the gardener manifold.” In other words, plant carefully, keep well-watered, and learn more at the link below:



http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/factsheets/trees-new/acer_palmatum_sangokaku.html