Workshops and Demonstrations

Thurs., June 5, 10:00a
* Drip Irrigation *
Thurs., June 19, 10:00a
* Plant Propagation Techniques * FEE *5.00
Thurs., July 10, 10:00a
* Preserving Your Bounty *
Thurs., July 24th, 10:00a
* Fall Vegetable Gardening *

All classes will begin in the auditorium at the Agricultural Building and are free unless otherwise indicated.*
Registration is required. Phone, visit or e-mail.

Contact us:
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This time of year vegetable gardens and flower beds are popping up everywhere. After the winter we just went through a lot of folks want to get outside and plant something. One of the greatest challenges is how to keep everything watered once the planting is finished. While we had a wet summer last year, I doubt that will happen again this summer.

Hand watering works very well because it requires you to look at every bed and gives you the opportunity to see potential problems. Insect, disease and weed issues are easier to address when they are just getting started. The disadvantage to hand watering is that it takes a lot of time especially if you have several beds. If you don’t have the time or patience to water by hand the job isn’t done well and the plants suffer. I prefer to use drip irrigation in my flower and vegetable gardens. It is very efficient in water use and saves a considerable amount of time. We’ll start our drip irrigation discussion with the vegetable garden.

Vegetable gardening is increasing in popularity partly because of the potential savings in the family food budget. These savings can be quickly lost to the higher water bills that result from watering the garden, especially if you are on a city water system. Vegetable gardens must be watered regularly to get good plant growth and production. The general recommendation is to supply the garden with 1 to 1.5 inches of water per week. The amount will vary from week to week depending on weather and the growth stage of the garden.
The typical garden is watered with some sort of sprinkler system that is inexpensive, but very inefficient in water use. Most sprinklers can be adjusted from full circle to part circle, but usually can’t be adjusted to avoid watering areas outside the actual garden. The sprinklers also water the aisles between the planted rows which can increase weed growth. The efficiency of a sprinkler system in a typical garden can be less than 25% which means that 75% of the water being applied by the sprinkler is wasted. In contrast, a well designed and installed drip irrigation system can be close to 100% efficient in watering the garden.

The other problem with using sprinklers to water the garden is the increased possibility of plant disease. Wetting the foliage of vegetable plants especially tomatoes is just asking for trouble. Wet foliage encourages the growth of early blight and several other foliar fungal diseases. While you will always have some foliar disease in your garden, using a drip irrigation system is much better than a sprinkler system in reducing plant disease.

Drip systems also work well in annual flower and shrub beds, but the parts are a little different. The drip line used for vegetable gardens is called T-tape and lays flat on the ground until filled with water. It is best used in straight lines. The drip line used for shrubs and flower beds is usually about a half inch in diameter and has the emitters formed inside the tubing. I like the inline tubing much better than the old solid tubing that had emitters on the outside. It seems the outside emitters would always come out creating a nice geyser effect. Micro-sprays are available to use in flower or groundcover beds where laying multiple runs of drip tubing is not efficient. Most micro-sprays have a low flow of about 3 gallons per hour and work well with drip systems.

Timers can be useful in operating the drip system, but should be used with care. The tendency is to set the timer up to run a certain number of days and forget it. That sometimes leads to the system being run even when we have had sufficient rain. I prefer to turn the system on manually and use the timer to turn the system off. This gives me the chance to look around the garden for leaks and other possible problems.

If you have any questions about drip irrigation or any other gardening topic please give me or Chris a call.
June Garden Tips

Even moisture is a key to preventing bitter cucumbers, underdeveloped onions and blossom-end rot in tomatoes. Implement a regular watering schedule when rainfall is less than one inch per week. To save water, keep the garden mulched and use drip irrigation or soaker hoses.

Try hilling 4” of soil around the bases of gladioli when they are about a foot tall to keep them from toppling over.

Remove spent flowers from your annuals or herbaceous perennials to keep them blooming. Self-cleaning flowers save time and work in the garden by dropping dead blooms, eliminating the need for extensive grooming. This easy-care list includes ageratum, cleome, gomphrena, impatiens, New Guinea impatiens, penas, wax begonia and narrowleaf zinnia.

Watch for leaf galls on azaleas and camellias. Prune off these fungus-infected parts and dispose of them in the trash. Clean your pruners in a 10% bleach solution between cuts to prevent spreading the disease.

Continue to plant all kinds of beans and southern peas. Make second plantings of tomatoes, cucumbers and squash for a late crop when older plants are fizzling. Get free tomato plants by planting a healthy sucker removed from the parent tomato plant. Keep it watered and new roots will form along the stem.

Add a light fertilizer side dressing to vegetables that have begun to set fruit. Be careful not to overfertilize okra. Excess nitrogen will cause rank growth but little fruit.

Bake up and discard all fallen fruit from underneath fruit trees to discourage insects and diseases. Keep blueberries picked to beat the birds.

Hand pick Japanese beetles and toss them into a jar filled with soapy water. This is most easily done in the early morning when insects are sluggish.

Before loading up the sprayer, have all pests - weed, insect, mite, or plant disease - properly identified. Correct diagnosis leads to proper pest control practices and timing of application. Incorrect diagnosis leads to misuse of pesticides and little or no control of the pest. Contact the Alamance County Cooperative Extension Service for assistance: 336-570-6740.

Before you start swatting and scratching, keep in mind that anything that collects more than one tablespoon of water will support a generation of mosquitoes. Empty and refill birdbaths and pet water dishes at least once a week. Empty saucers under pots or eliminate the saucers all together. Places that collect water and can’t be emptied are candidates for mosquito ‘dunks’. Floating rings that contain a bacteria toxic to mosquito larvae but not to pond fish or pets.

When using any pesticide, wear pesticide resistant gloves, long pants and closed shoes. Always read and follow label instructions and keep children and pets off treated areas until completely dry.
Stokes’ Aster

Stokesia laevis, commonly known as Stokes’ aster or cornflower aster, is native to wetlands, bottomlands, wet pinewoods, savannas and ditches mostly along the coastal plain from North Carolina to Florida to Louisiana. This sturdy perennial typically grows to 1-2' tall and features fluffy, cornflower-like flowers (to 2 1/2” across), each with notched rays surrounding a pincushion center of feathery disk florets. Flowers bloom from early to mid-summer in shades of violet-blue and sometimes creamy white atop generally erect, leafy stems that rise from a basal rosette of medium green leaves (to 6” long). Stem leaves are stalkless and smaller than basal leaves. Leaves are evergreen in warm winter climates.

Stokes’ aster performs best in average, medium, well-drained soils in full sun. Prefers moist soils, but has surprisingly good drought tolerance. Wet soil in winter is the main cause of death for this plant. A well-drained soil is essential. Deadhead individual spent flowers and remove spent flowering stems to encourage a fall re-bloom.

Genus name honors English physician/botanist Jonathan Stokes (1755-1831).

Learn more here:
http://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/all/stokesia-laevis/