



Alamance Gardener

Alamance County Cooperative Extension Horticulture Department

Coming Events

Workshops and Demonstrations

Thurs., Feb 8, 10:00a DEMO

Grapevine Pruning

Thurs., Feb 22, 10:00a

Homies and Honeyes—Native Bees & Honey Bee Update

Thurs., Mar. 1, 10:00a DEMO

Fruit Tree Pruning Workshop at Buster Sykes Demonstration Orchard, 2430 Turner Road, Mebane

Thurs., Mar. 8, 10:00a DEMO

Pruning Shrubs and Trees

Thurs., Mar. 22, 10:00a

Spring Birds—Watch Your Windows!

Unless noted otherwise, classes will begin in the auditorium at the Agricultural Building and are free. Registration is required. Register online here: <https://goo.gl/S2QgnW>

Or call 336-570-6740

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The Unkindest Cut



Crape myrtles are one of my favorite landscape plants. They have few pest problems and they bloom longer than any other flowering tree I can think of. Some varieties like 'Miami', 'Muskogee' and 'Natchez' may bloom for over 100 days. In fact, if you cut off the blooms when they start to fade, the crape myrtles will put out new growth and bloom again.

Unfortunately crape myrtles are often mistreated in our landscapes. Many folks think that crape myrtles need to be pruned back severely every year to encourage flowering. Rett Davis often calls this pruning technique 'Crape Murder'. That name is a little misleading because severely pruned crape myrtles rarely die. If they did, then perhaps that pruning technique would be stopped.

A Resurrection Story

While it is true that crape myrtles bloom on new growth, topping crape myrtles actually decreases flowering. Even though I had seen the research about severe pruning reducing flowering, Chris and I wanted to try it ourselves on one of the crape myrtles at the office. The topped crape myrtle bloomed about 30 days after the unpruned trees and had about 40% fewer flowers. More work and fewer flowers just does not make much sense to me.



It took six years of careful annual pruning to bring back this “murdered” crape myrtle, but you can still see the misshapen ‘knuckles’ where the cuts were made.

lower laterals that are at least one third the diameter of the stem that is to be removed. This maintains the natural shape of the tree and keeps the size under control. If your tree is 20 feet tall and you want it to be 10 feet tall, thinning probably won’t work and you’ll want to consider the last option., which is to renovate the tree.

“Renovate” is just a fancy way to say cut the tree down to the ground and start over. The stump will send up numerous sprouts in the spring and these will be the beginnings of the new tree. Select three to five of the most vigorous sprouts that are well spaced around the stump. Remove all the other competing sprouts that try to grow throughout the summer. You will probably have a nice new five to six foot tall crape myrtle by the end of the summer. The trick is to thin the tallest branches on a yearly basis in order to maintain the height you desire.

If you are interested in proper crape myrtle pruning, please plan to attend our Think Green Thursdays class on March 8.



Ready for renovation, we will demonstrate the first steps to bringing this crape myrtle back to glory at our Think Green Thursday class scheduled for March 8th at 10:00 AM.



Some folks are not concerned about flowering and want to cut back their crape myrtles because they have gotten too big for the space. This is a problem that can be solved in several ways. The first would be to select the right variety before planting. There are over 90 varieties of crape myrtles that range in height from two feet to over thirty feet. If you choose the right variety, pruning will never be a problem. Of course if the existing crape myrtle has been in your landscape for some time, you may not want the expense of digging it up and planting a new one.

The next option is to try to lower the height of the tree by thinning out the tallest stems. This works best if you start thinning before the tree gets too large. The idea is to prune back the tallest stems to

We have two crape myrtles that we cut to the ground last year and we will demonstrate how to thin the stems to grow a new tree. We will also look at a crape myrtle that was cut to the ground six years ago to see how well it is doing now.

If you have questions about crape myrtle pruning or any other gardening questions, please give me or Chris a call.

NC STATE

Extension Master Gardener



February Garden Tips

Draw up a layout for your vegetable garden. Try to rotate vegetable crops so that the same families of plants are not growing in the same spot year after year. A five-year rotation is ideal to reduce plant-specific pest and disease populations, but if that's not practical for you, a rotation of as little as three years would still be helpful. Remember that cabbage, broccoli, turnips, collards, Brussels sprouts, kale, kohlrabi and cauliflower are all in the same family! Another popular vegetable family includes potatoes, tomatoes, eggplants and peppers.

Now is the time to plant potatoes, broccoli and onion sets and seeds of carrots, cabbage, onions, peas, radishes, rutabagas, spinach and turnips.

You may fertilize trees and shrubs this month, if needed. In general, if trees and shrubs are growing at a rate that is acceptable to you and the foliage looks healthy, there is no need to fertilize. Excessive fertilizer can cause rank growth and create more pruning chores, which, in itself, is invigorating to the plant.

Grapes and large fruit trees should be pruned this month to enhance fruit production, remove unwanted growth, and improve framework. Attend one of our free pruning demonstrations this month to learn the best way to improve your fruit yields. See page 1 for days, times and locations. This year, our fruit tree pruning demonstration will be held at our new demonstration orchard located on Turner Road in Mebane.

Spray wild onion and wild garlic in lawns with a broadleaf herbicide. Be sure to read the label on the product you use and follow the directions carefully. Keep in mind that most of these products work best when air temperature is between 50 and 80 degrees as that is when the weeds are actively growing and will take up the material. You will want to add a spreader-sticker to the spray mix to help the herbicide adhere to those skinny leaves.

You can divide perennials now as the tips emerge. Daylilies, Siberian iris, hostas, and shasta daisies are a few to divide and replant now.

Trim back ornamental grasses this month. Muhlenbergia, Miscanthus, Pennisetum and other grasses will have a fresher look come spring if old foliage is cut back now. The trick is to cut only the old foliage and avoid nipping the new growth tips. If new growth has begun, adjust cutting height accordingly. Although not a grass, Liriope (also known as "Monkey Grass," ironically) should be cut back now, too. This is easily done with your lawn mower. Set the blade high and go!

Sedges and other grass-like ground covers such as dwarf Mondo should be cut back only if the old foliage is looking ragged. These plants are a bit slower to recover.

Fertilize your Fescue lawn this month, applying one pound of actual Nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. Rely on your soil test results for recommendations for Phosphorus, Potassium and lime. If you haven't had your soil tested yet and have not applied lime for a few years, you may safely apply up to 40 pounds of lime per 1,000 square feet of lawn.

Arbor Gate Plant of the Month



Distylium

Isu Tree

Are you bored with boxwoods? Had it with hollies? Junipers got you jaded? Looking for something new in the evergreen department?

Check out the Isu tree! This witchhazel relative is evergreen, compact, disease and insect resistant, heat and drought tolerant—they'll even grow in wet soils! *Distylium* requires very little pruning and has good resistance to deer and rabbit browsing. Top all that off with interesting red-maroon flowers that appear in February and you have a great addition to your shrub border or foundation plantings.

Thanks to noted plantsman Dr. Michael Dirr and his plant professional partners, Jeff Beasley and Mark Griffin at Plant Introductions, Inc., you have a choice of varieties that range in mature height from three to ten feet and four to eight feet wide.

The cascading growth habit is especially nice draped over a wall.

Foliage color ranges from glossy dark green to blue green with some varieties sporting coppery-red new foliage.

Read more about this great new plant here:

<https://goo.gl/Djw4zZ>

