

July 2018

Volume 9, Issue 7



# Alamance Gardener

*Alamance County Cooperative Extension Horticulture Department*

## Coming Events

### Workshops, Demos, etcetera

Thurs., July 12, 10:00a

*Home Landscaping*

Sat., July 21, 9:00a

*Tour of Buster Sykes Demonstration Orchard*  
2430 Turner Road, Mebane

Thurs., July 26, 10:00a

*Preserving Your Bounty*

Thurs., Aug. 9, 10:00a

*Fall Lawn Care*

Thurs., Aug. 23, 10:00a

*Garden In A Jar Terrarium Workshop-FEE\**

Thurs., Sept. 6, 10:00a

*Meet The Ferns and Their Frond Spike*

Wed., Sept 19, 9AM-6PM

**MASTER GARDENER PLANT SALE**

Classes will begin in the auditorium at the Agricultural Building and are free unless otherwise indicated.

Registration is required.

Call 336-570-6740, or register online here:

<http://alamance.ces.ncsu.edu/>

*\*\$10 Fee covers the cost of materials to build your own garden in a jar*

## Contact us :

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## Compost Happens.



A common problem that home gardeners face is what to do with the zucchinis that have gotten too big or the tomatoes that look great from the front, but are rotten on the backside. If you live in the country, you can just throw the unwanted vegetables over the garden fence and let nature take care of it. However if you live in a housing development like I do, that is not an option. For some reason most folks just don't care to have rotten vegetables thrown into their yard.



## Let It Rot!



There are many kinds of fancy (and expensive!) compost barrels and tumblers. They work well for gardeners with limited space, but they do need to be turned on a regular basis. I don't have as much time or energy as I used to so those composters don't work for me. I prefer a three-chambered bin which can be constructed out of wood or 2x4 welded wire fencing. An even less expensive option is to build three wire cylinders out of the same welded wire fencing. They are easy to build and have the advantage of being portable.

The rate of decomposition of organic materials depends on several factors including aeration, moisture and particle size. Oxygen is necessary for the soil microbes to do their job of breaking down organic matter. A compost pile that lacks oxygen won't decompose efficiently and may have some unpleasant odors. Microbes also need adequate moisture and the compost may need to be watered if it gets too dry, but too much water can be as bad as too little. If you can squeeze a few drops of water from a handful of compost, the moisture content is about right. The size of the materials you put in the compost bin has a big influence on how fast it will decompose. I have put a large zucchini in the compost that was still recognizable after several weeks. Another zucchini of the same size that was chopped into smaller pieces was gone in less than a week. A square shovel is a good tool to use for the chopping process.

The carbon to nitrogen ratio of the organic materials in the compost bin will affect the rate of decomposition. The microbes that break down organic matter require nitrogen for their metabolism, so a lack of nitrogen will slow down the composting process. Trying to figure out the carbon to nitrogen ratio of everything that goes into the compost bin can become a rather complicated process. I prefer to just categorize things as green or brown. Green stuff is my nitrogen source and brown stuff is the carbon. The best source of carbon is tree leaves.

Now what can go in the compost bin? Kitchen wastes like coffee grounds, raw vegetable scraps and eggshells are fine. Try to avoid cooked vegetables, meats, grease and dairy products that may attract rodents. Pet waste should never go in the compost because of the possibility of disease transmission. Most non-woody yard and garden plant material are good sources of nitrogen for the compost bin. I always use two buckets to pick my tomatoes. One bucket is for the tomatoes that go to the house; the other bucket is for the culls that go straight to the compost. It is best to leave grass clippings on the lawn as much as possible so their nutrients can go back into the lawn.

Now that you have had the somewhat technical explanation of composting, let me tell you how it works in my garden. I start with a bottom layer of leaves that I collected the previous fall. Next is a layer of rotten produce or plants that were pulled out of the garden when they finished producing. That layer is then covered with another layer of leaves. This layering process continues until the bin is full. You always want to have the compost pile covered with leaves unless you really like to have a lot of flies breeding on the rotten tomatoes. When the first bin is full, I start on the next section. By the time the third section is full, the first section is usually ready to go on the garden. I know that I should turn the piles from section to section, but that is just too much work. It does take a little longer for the materials to decompose without turning, but it works well for me.

If you have any questions about composting or any other gardening topics, please give me or Chris a call. For more complete information on composting, click the link:

Composting for Home Gardens

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/backyard-composting-of-yard-garden-and-food-discards>



## NC STATE

### Extension Master Gardener

## July Garden Tips



**A**nual bedding plants will benefit from a summer haircut. Stagger your pruning by cutting back one-third of a bed or container each week. By the third week, the first group of pruned plants will be blooming again, assuring some color during the entire pruning period. Annual plants grown for their foliage, such as coleus and basil, will produce more leaves if the flowers are pinched out regularly.

**R**emove water sprouts and weak new growth from apple trees, crapemyrtles and others. Summer pruning is less likely to produce more weak growth.

**F**ertilize established warm-season (Zoysia or Bermudagrass) lawns at the rate of one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. Unlike fescue, which should be kept tall – at least 3 to 3-and-a-half inches, warm-season lawns need to be maintained at a height of only  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1". This promotes dense growth and discourages many weeds.

**E**ven moisture at the root zone of tomatoes may help prevent blossom-end rot. Use soaker hoses or drip irrigation rather than overhead watering to reduce disease pressure and keep plants mulched.

**P**lant Brussels sprouts, carrots and rutabagas from July 1<sup>st</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup>. Around the middle of the month begin planting beets, broccoli and collards. Keep summer vegetables picked to encourage production.

**I**f you are willing to keep them well-watered all summer, roses may be fertilized every four weeks until mid-August. This will keep them blooming well into fall. However, if deep watering is not an option, roses can be rested this month. Keep blossoms cut to encourage further bloom, too!

**M**ature vines of poison ivy, trumpet creeper, English ivy and wisteria that climb your trees can be killed at this time. Cut a chunk from the vine near the base of

the plant, being careful not to cut the resident tree. Apply brush killer to the cut. The cut must be fresh – no more than 15 minutes old. Bag vines and dispose of in the trash. Never burn poison ivy!!!

**B**rown patch is a disease that attacks cool-season lawns and is encouraged by overwatering and over fertilizing with nitrogen. Allow your cool-season (Fescue) lawn to go dormant, watering only if there has been no rainfall for three or four weeks. Remember that no lawn grass is green year round.

**A**dd Swiss chard to your summer vegetable garden for a more heat-tolerant source of greens. The "Rainbow" variety will give you some golds and reds, too! If chard becomes over-mature, cut it back to about 4 inches. After cutting, it will send out tender new leaves. Note that extended dry weather can cause chard to bolt or go to seed.

## *Arbor Gate Plant of the Month*



### Russian Sage

### *Perovskia atriplicifolia*

Friend to pollinators, eschewed by deer and rabbits, comfortable in the middle of an overheated asphalt parking lot, Russian sage is a perfect choice for that garden spot the hose just won't reach. This perennial native of Afghanistan and Tibet has adjusted very well to life in Alamance County and, although it may self sow a bit in its happy place, it is not an aggressive spreader. This woody-based perennial of the mint family typically grows two to four feet tall and features finely-dissected, aromatic (when crushed), gray-green leaves on stiff, upright, square stems. Whorls of two-lipped, tubular, light blue flowers are tiered in branched, terminal panicles. The long summer bloom period is one reason Russian sage was named a Perennial Plant Association Plant of the Year (1995). Excellent drainage is a must and full sun is best—stems are more likely to flop if plants are grown in part shade. Cut back plants almost to the ground in late winter to early spring as soon as new growth appears.

Read more here:

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/all/perovskia-atriplicifolia/>

