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*Alamance County Cooperative Extension Horticulture Department*

## Coming Events

### Workshops and Demonstrations

**We'll be doing things a little differently for the next few classes. Learn something new from the comfort of your home during these live Zoom workshops. Registration is required, but all classes are free.**

### Register here:

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

Thurs., June 11, 10:00a

*Propagating Woody Plants*

Thurs., June 25, 10:00a

*Pressure Canning*

Sat., June 27, 10:00a

*Pressure Canning*

Thurs., July 16, 10:00a

*Water Bath Canning*

Sat., July 18, 10:00a

*Water Bath Canning*

Visit our new YouTube page for informative videos from Alamance County Extension.. Subscribe and be the first to see new content:

[Alamance County CES](#)

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## The Problem With Pests

We get calls every day at the extension office from homeowners wanting to know what to spray for some plant or insect problem. We also get calls from people wanting to know why the product they already used didn't work. These folks probably have used a pesticide without knowing anything about the 'pest' they were trying to control.



Many people get their gardening information from commercials on television or some internet website. The main problem with this type of information is that it may come from companies that are trying to sell a product. They usually will not tell you that you probably don't really need their product.



## *Remain Calm...Take An Integrated Approach.*

Integrated Pest Management is a practice we should all use in our home landscapes and vegetable gardens. There are several steps that make up a successful IPM program that you should be familiar with. The first step is detection and scouting. You should inspect your plants on a regular basis and know what healthy plants should look like. Regular inspections also allow you to catch a possible insect problem before it gets out of control.

The next step is knowing what your plants are. Plant identification is helpful in diagnosing the problem. There usually are specific insects and diseases associated with specific plants. We can do a better job of diagnosing your problem if you can tell us something more than it is a 'big green bush'. If you are not sure what a plant is you can send us a picture or bring a sample to our office. While our office is not open right now, you can still leave a sample in the front foyer. Proper identification of an insect is also very important. Less than 3% of the insects in our yards are actually harmful. Again, we can help with pest identification. Once we know what the pest is, we can make a good recommendation.

We are getting a lot of calls now about broadleaf weeds in the lawn. Advertisers spend large amounts of money this time of year promoting their weed control products. What they fail to mention is that most of the winter annuals like henbit and chickweed have already produced thousands of seeds for next fall's crop of weeds. Those weeds should have been treated back in the fall before they started flowering and making seeds, but you never see any lawn care products advertised in the winter. Of course, if you treated the weeds in the fall and winter before they made seeds, you wouldn't need to buy as much weed control product this spring.

Damage threshold is another term that should be in your gardening vocabulary. Many of the insects and diseases that you see in your yard do not do any significant damage. A few leaf spots or chewed leaves may not require a pesticide application.



Often, we can avoid problems by making good plant choices and making sure that our plants are growing well. A soil test is a simple and free way to determine if there is a pH or fertility problem. Buying and using an azalea fertilizer without knowing if you need that product is a waste of money and may actually harm your azaleas. In many cases our soil is sufficiently acidic for azaleas and may require lime instead of an acidic fertilizer.

There are a number of management methods we should use once we determine we actually have a pest problem. Picking caterpillars, bagworms and Japanese beetles off our plants is a little messy, but can be very effective and does not require a pesticide purchase. Many times, cleaning up dead leaves and picking up fallen branches can reduce potential insects and disease problems. Biological insect control can be helpful in some cases, but is not useful in all situations. A common recommendation is for the use of lady beetles to control aphids. While lady beetles can eat a lot of aphids it is hard to keep them in your yard. If they don't find a sufficient food source, they'll just move on to your neighbor's yard.

A good biological control option is the use of a Bt product for caterpillars. Bt is a naturally occurring bacterium that is sold as Dipel or Thuricide. The last option to consider is chemical pest control and should be used with caution. Read the pesticide label carefully to make sure the pest and the affected plant is listed. There have been many cases where a gardener has sprayed an insecticide labeled for tomatoes on the entire garden and lost everything but the tomatoes.

It is a good idea to keep a garden journal. Keep records of when a particular pest problem occurred and know what management method you used and how effective it was. The good news is you don't need to be a plant expert to garden successfully. You just need to know who to call. Chris and I can help with identification of weed, insect and disease problems. We can tell you if any control measures are necessary and what the most appropriate method is.

## NC STATE

### Extension Master Gardener



## June Garden Tips

Summer pruning begins this month. Now is a good time to prune spring flowering shrubs like azaleas, forsythia, quince and rhododendron. All of these plants will start to form their flower buds for next spring in July and August. As long as they are pruned before the first of July, they will not lose any of next spring's bloom. It is fine to do severe pruning on any of these shrubs that have gotten out of control. They will put out new leaves shortly and will look fine by fall.

Summer pruning and training of fruit trees is an often neglected chore that will lessen the dormant pruning work and improve fruit quality and yield. Contact Extension for more information.

Because it is less invigorating than dormant season pruning, summer pruning won't stimulate growth in the form of suckers and water sprouts. So, this is the best time to remove unwanted suckers from crape myrtles and other trees. It's also a fine time to do any needed pruning and shaping of 'bleeders', such as dogwoods and maples.

Remember that spring-planted trees and shrubs will need extra care during the warm days ahead. Do not fertilize these plants until next year, but keep them well-watered all summer.

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 fade. Cuttings of sucker shoots without buds from healthy tomato plants are easy to root in moist potting medium and will give you a second planting free of charge!

Harvest garlic when leaves begin to brown. Allow to dry in a covered, shady area with good air circulation. When dry, brush off any remaining soil, trim roots close to the bulb and either trim leaves or braid. Store at room temperature.

Did you know that anything that collects more than one tablespoon of water will support a generation of mosquitoes? Empty, rinse and refill birdbaths and pet water dishes at least once a week. Empty saucers under pots or eliminate the

saucers altogether. 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, birds or pets. Be sure gutters and downspouts are running freely—a clogged gutter is another potential mosquito breeding ground. Look high and low for sources of standing water. Wholesale spraying of your yard and garden has proven to be ineffective at preventing mosquitoes from crossing property lines. The best offense is a good defense.

All garden vegetables will benefit from an even moisture supply when the weather heats up. This can prevent bitter cucumbers, underdeveloped onions and blossom-end rot in tomatoes. Supplement rainfall when there is less than one inch per week and keep the garden mulched. Use drip irrigation or soaker hoses to water efficiently without wetting the foliage.

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

## *Arbor Gate Plant of the Month*



### Starrush Whitetop

### *Rhynchospora colorata*

Looking for a groundcover for a damp area in your sunny garden? Solving a drainage problem by installing a rain garden? Consider this unusual native. Starrush whitetop is a unique and long-lived perennial sedge. It is known (and named) for its striking bracts that are often mistaken for a daisy-like flower. The bracts are white with green tips. The inflorescence is actually a dense cluster of small spikes, each bearing many tiny flowers. Leaf blades arise from the base of the plant and are long and tapering.

Like most sedges, starrush whitetop stems are triangular. But, unlike most sedges and other grass species, which are wind pollinated, starrush whitetop is pollinated by insects that are attracted to the showy bracts.

The unusual flowers shine from June until frost atop one- to two-foot high stalks. The bright green foliage has a cool, grassy appearance and will quickly spread by rhizomes to fill a damp or even an inundated area. Cut back in winter for a flush of green in spring, followed by the long-lasting flower show.

Read more here:

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/rhynchospora-colorata/>

