



Alamance Gardener

Alamance County Cooperative Extension Horticulture Department

Coming Events



Thu., Mar. 18, 10:00a - [ONLINE](#)

Healing Gardens

Thu., Apr. 1, 10:00a - [ONLINE](#)

Parking Lot (and other hot spot) gardens

Thu., Apr. 15, 10:00a - [ONLINE](#)

Planting for Pollinators

Registration is required for all classes.

Register here:

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

Now through Wed., Mar. 31st

4-H Spring Plant Sale: Click the pic.



Contact us :

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Like us on Face-
book, Click the
link below:



Welcome, Bill Kleiner!



We are so happy to welcome William (Bill) Kleiner as our new Alamance County Extension director and horticulture agent. Bill has extensive experience in tree and small fruit production, as well as a number of horticultural crops.

Bill comes to us from Pennsylvania, where he received a bachelor's degree in horticulture. He was a diagnostician in Penn State's Plant Disease Clinic while earning his master's degree in plant pathology. He conducted Extension education programs for commercial and home fruit growers in a seven-county region in southcentral PA and then became the Adams County Extension director in Gettysburg, PA. He also served as regional director for seventeen counties in southeast Pennsylvania, providing administrative and programmatic leadership for more than 250 staff. Bill became a key member of the Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences administrative group as an associate director of Extension, where he was responsible for daily oversight of district/county operations and supervision of Extension's 22 district directors.

Although Pennsylvania is a Zone to the north of us (USDA Plant Hardiness Zone 6 to our Zone 7) things aren't so different up there. Give him a week or two to acclimate and then he can be reached at [\(336\) 570-6740](tel:3365706740) or email Bill_Kleiner@ncsu.edu.

Getting the Blues in Your Garden

These berries are just the kind of 'blues' you want in your garden! Blueberries are among the easiest of fruit-bearing plants to grow. The pretty spring flowers are favorites of native pollinators and are followed in summer by delicious fruit—now heralded as a 'super food' by health experts. Bonus—outstanding fall foliage color! Blueberries have few pest problems, and, except for a bit of training and pruning, are extra low in the maintenance department.



Training blueberry bushes needs to begin in the first year, but rarely happens. The blueberry plants need to be cut back by half in the first year. That means the 24" tall plant you just bought should be pruned back to 12" and all the flower buds should be removed. While that seems a little harsh, we want to get the plant well established in the first year so we can expect a good twenty years of production. The second year's pruning should be mostly the removal of weak or damaged stems. Any stems that grew vigorously and didn't branch should be cut in half. Again the flower buds need to be removed. It is disappointing not to have fruit in the second year, but the process of growing fruit is very stressful and can reduce the life of the blueberry bush if it is not well established.

We can finally have some fruit in the third year, but about half of the flower buds should be removed. This prevents permanent bending of young canes under a heavy fruit load. Remove any weak or damaged stems and cut back any vigorous unbranched stem.



So what do you do with a blueberry bush that has not been pruned in several years and has gotten completely out of hand? The first step is to remove any sprouts outside of a 24" diameter circle around the base of the plant. If the sprout has roots, you can dig them up and transplant them. The next step is to selectively remove about a third of the oldest and tallest stems as well as any stems that are bending toward the ground. Any vigorous new stems that grow this year and don't branch can be cut back in half in late July. This will reduce the amount of dormant

pruning necessary and will help increase yields. If you continue this renovation pruning for the next two years, you'll have a plant that's just the right size and be able to harvest your blueberries with ease.

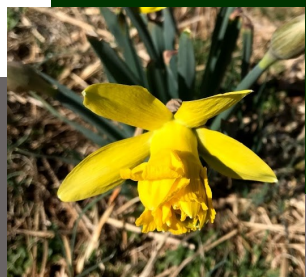


NC STATE**Extension
Master Gardener***March Garden Tips*

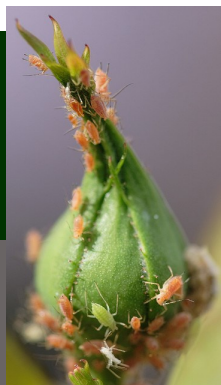
Apply pre-emergence crabgrass preventer to your lawn before March 15th. Keep in mind that most crabgrass preventers should not be used on recently seeded or over seeded lawns. Read the label carefully before application. A second application should be applied about the middle of May (8 weeks after the first). If your lawn is mowed tall (3-1/2 inches or so) and growing well, crabgrass will be shaded out as the seed requires sunlight to germinate.



Finish pruning roses this month. Reduce hybrid tea roses to 24 inches, prune to an outside bud and remove dead wood. Begin your rose spray program as soon as first leaves appear. Even better, plant some of the tough shrub roses that don't require spraying.



Fertilize pecan trees at the rate of 4 pounds of 10-10-10 per inch of trunk diameter. Spread the fertilizer under the limbs of the tree to the full extent of the drip line.



In the vegetable garden, sow seeds of beets, lettuce, peas and turnips. Plant cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, head lettuce and onions.

If your cool-season vegetable garden usually succumbs to unseasonable heat,

try gardening in containers. Pots can easily be moved to a more sheltered spot if unusual heat – or cold – threatens.

Cut back old foliage of liriope, pampas and other ornamental grasses as close as possible to the ground without damaging new growth tips.

Remove spent flowers from spring bulbs but leave the foliage to replenish the bulb for next year. Don't braid or otherwise damage the leaves, but allow them to die down naturally. Plant other annuals and perennials among the bulbs to disguise unsightly foliage.

As new leaves of roses and other plants emerge, expect an infestation of aphids. These tiny insects have sucking mouth parts that pierce the leaf tissue and cause unsightly, though not usually life-threatening, damage. A sharp stream from the garden hose should dispatch these critters.

Using Saved Seeds?

To find out if saved seeds are still viable, follow these simple steps:

1 ~ Take a piece of paper towel, fold it in half, then half again, so you have a square. Fold it again, but open out this fold.

2 ~ Sprinkle water on the paper towel so it is slightly damp all over, not wet.

3 ~ Write the name of the plant and the date on a plant label and put it in the middle of the square, with one edge of the label on the middle fold.

4 ~ Put 10 seeds on the same side as the label.

5 ~ Fold the paper towel over the seeds.

6 ~ Put it in a plastic bag, and close the bag loosely.

Check every few days. Count the seeds that sprout and calculate the seeds' viability (if six of 10 seeds have sprouted, that is a 60% germination rate). Sow the varieties that have lower rates more thickly to compensate.

Saving Seeds?

Those little seed packets can be expensive! To save them for next season, place the packets in an airtight container with one of those silica packets that came with your last Amazon purchase, or fold up a little dry milk powder in a tissue paper packet.



Arbor Gate Plant of the Month



Virginia Bluebells

Mertensia virginica

This native harbinger of spring belongs in every Alamance County woodland garden. Leaves emerge with reddish tips in early March and soon unfold to a soft gray-green. The nodding trumpet-shaped flowers begin as pink buds and gradually become true blue as the blossoms open. A favorite of pollinators and early arriving hummingbirds, this ‘step-over’ plant is just the soft touch to add under trees.

In partial shade and moist, cool soil high in organic matter, *Mertensia virginica* will form a clump about 12 inches tall and two feet wide and die back to the ground by mid summer. Plant them alone or among other woodland plants. They can be easily propagated by sowing fresh seed or dividing plants in spring.

Read more here:

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/mertensia-virginica/>

