



# Alamance Gardener

Alamance County Cooperative Extension Horticulture Department

## Coming Events

### Workshops and Demonstrations



- April 1, 10 a.m.—ONLINE  
*Parking Lot (and other hot spot) Gardening*
- April 15, 10 a.m.—ONLINE  
*Picking Plants for Picky Pollinators*
- Thurs., May 13, 10:00a—ONLINE  
*Composting Strategies*
- Thurs., May 27, 10:00a—ONLINE  
*Tomato Troubles*

Registration is required for all classes.  
Register online here:

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

Friday and Saturday, April 16 and 17  
*22nd Annual WRC Herb Festival*  
Master Gardeners will be on hand to answer your gardening questions.



### Contact us :

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## So, You Want To Grow Your Own?



It's the beginning of strawberry picking season and you are thinking about growing your own strawberries in your garden. It's a good time to plan by using the next six months as your preparation time so you do it right! Many people try growing strawberries without doing the proper preparation of their site, in turn become frustrated and give up growing the strawberries. Let's go through the process to prepare you for a fall planting. The following is a list of questions you need to ask yourself if you want to successfully grow strawberries in your garden.

### How is your site for growing strawberries?

Strawberries need at least 8 hours of sunlight each day. Avoid sites with tall trees or buildings to their south due to the low angle of the sun in the winter.

### How is your soil?

Sandy loam to clay loam soils are preferable. Plants need well-drained soil, because they don't like "wet feet." Take the next six months to add compost to improve soil structure and nutrient availability. Soil sampling to a depth of eight inches is recommended 6 months before planting, so you can add lime to get the target pH of 6-6.5 and determine what fertilization you need before planting.

### Do you have a lot of weeds on the site?

Use an herbicide to eliminate perennial weeds or till the soil a number of times in the next six months to decrease weed populations. If you are using a matted row system you definitely need to eliminate the perennial weeds, especially if you keep the strawberry plants for more than one year. The plasticulture system will help you with some of the weed control, plus you are replacing plants every year.

## Berry Good Strategies

### Do you want a raised bed planting or a matted row planting?

Raised beds can be a way to provide a good growing medium for the strawberries. Beds should be at least 6 to 8 inches deep. There are a number of raised bed designs with or without plastic. In the traditional matted row system, plants are spaced at 18 - 24 inches apart in the row depending on the vigor of the cultivar. The runners fill in the gaps between the plants. Usually if you are planting more than one row, you should plant them 36-48 inches between rows to allow enough walking space.



### Should I use black plastic mulch?

Strawberry growers in North Carolina use a plasticulture production system that uses a special black plastic to cover the soil. Made for farming, this plastic is very thin yet strong and flexible. The flexibility of the plastic allows you to gently stretch it over the soil without tearing. The black plastic warms the soil, acts as a mulch to suppress weeds and conserve water, and limits disease. Black plastic is usually 5 feet wide and comes in rolls. You can purchase the material through a farm supply store or local garden center. To find out more information on the plasticulture system please see this site: <https://strawberries.ces.ncsu.edu/strawberries-plasticulture-production/>

### Do you have water to keep them irrigated through the growing season?

Strawberries need plenty of water throughout the growing season to get good plant and berry growth, so have a good source of water if you are going to grow strawberries. Drip irrigation will allow you to put the water right to the root system and not on the leaves of the plant.

### What varieties should I plant?

The North Carolina State Strawberry Program has some great varieties they have been working on in the past few years. Remember you are looking for varieties that do well in North Carolina, not in other parts of the country. Chandler and Camarosa are the two most common varieties you will see in pick-your-own operations in this area. April and May are months to go look at different varieties on farms and see what you prefer for your garden. To learn more about cultivars please look at this web site:

<https://strawberries.ces.ncsu.edu/straberry-breeding-progam/strawberries-plasticulture-considerations-varieties/>

### When do you plant strawberry plants?

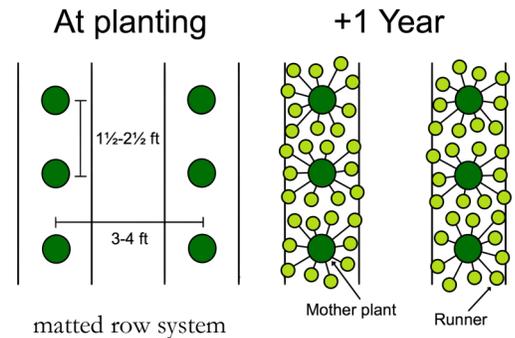
Strawberry plants should be planted in the early fall, usually in September. They will grow throughout the fall, winter, and spring with fruit ready to harvest by April or May. In the plasticulture system you will plant every year. In the matted row system you will plant every 2-3 years, depending on the weeds and the production of the plants.

**What about wildlife?** Deer love to eat small strawberry plants. I have even seen groundhogs eat plants to the ground. You might have to invest in fencing if you have some of these critters.

Hopefully, the answers to some of the strawberry growing questions above will give you a good start on how to prepare your strawberry site to grow some nice berries for your home use. We will talk more in the fall about pest management and renovating your strawberries the following year. If you have any further questions on growing strawberries in your home garden, see this publication

<https://burke.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/strawberries-in-the-home-garden-copy.pdf?fwd=no>

or call our office at 336-570-6740.



## NC STATE

### Extension Master Gardener

## *April Garden Tips*

**R**outine soil sampling is free again at the USDA & CS Soil Lab. We have the forms, sample boxes and instructions here at the Extension office, and between April 1 and Thanksgiving the testing is FREE!

**A**pril is a good month to start scouting for insect pests on your shrubs and trees. Aphids, azalea lace bugs and Boxwood leaf miners will be active this month. Look closely at your plants to see what kind of insects might be present and determine if the amount of damage warrants intervention. Proper identification is necessary before any control methods are used. Less than 3 percent of the insects you will see are actually potential plant pests. Most insects are beneficial and will help control the bugs that cause problems. If you have an insect on your shrubs or trees that needs to be identified, contact us at Extension, 336-570-6740.

**A**round the middle of the month, begin planting seeds of sweet corn, pole beans, lima and snap beans, cantaloupe, cucumbers, summer squash, pumpkins and watermelons.

**W**ait until the end of the month to plant tomatoes, peppers and eggplant. These do best when night temperatures are consistently above 50 degrees and the soil has warmed.

**B**egin spraying fruit trees with a home orchard spray as soon as the flower petals fade. Be sure to wait until the petals have faded. Most home orchard sprays contain insecticides that will kill pollinators visiting the flowers. Always read and follow label directions.

**N**ow is the time to begin to fertilize your warm-season lawn (Bermudagrass or Zoysia). Apply ½ pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet. That translates to 5 pounds of 10-10-10 for an area 10 feet by 100 feet. Repeat the application in June and August.

**I**f yours is a cool-season lawn (Fescue or Fescue-bluegrass), mowing season is here! Set your mower blade high - at least 3 inches, preferably 3-1/2. The higher the grass blades, the deeper the roots! Try not to take more than one-third of the blade off when you mow. This may mean mowing more than once a week this time of year.

**L**eave grass clippings on the lawn! Grasscycling, rather than bagging and removing grass clippings, is an excellent way to reduce waste and improve the health of your turf. Grass clippings contain nitrogen and water pulled from the soil. When you grasscycle, you return that nitrogen and moisture to your lawn. Clippings left on the lawn do not create thatch and improve the physical structure of soil. You can reduce the amount of nitrogen you add to your lawn by as much as one-third if you grasscycle!

**D**ivide, repot and fertilize houseplants before moving them outdoors at the end of the month. Remember that they've been in lower light conditions indoors than they will experience outside. Bright shade works for most houseplants.

**W**hen selecting summer annuals, look for short, bushy plants with well-developed root systems and more buds than flowers.





## False indigo

## *Baptisia spp.*

We've loved *Baptisia* in our pollinator patch for years, but until we planted it in the middle of the Ag Building parking lot, we didn't fully appreciate what a most excellent plant this native is!

Surviving and even blooming in the shade, *Baptisia* really puts on a flower show when planted in full sun. It flowers in shades of purple, yellow and white, with many new colorful cultivars, thanks to hybridizers taking advantage of the prolific and early-age blooms. In full sun, *Baptisia* will form a clump about 3 feet wide with flower spikes rising to as tall as 3 feet, depending on the species. Pea-like flowers are followed by interesting pea-like seed pods nestled among an attractive blue-green mound of foliage that stands up until frost.

The deep roots that help *Baptisia* withstand drought also make it nearly impossible to divide or move. Fortunately, *Baptisia* grows readily from seed

Not bothered by disease, drought or deer and shaking off insect pests while attracting pollinators, you'll find that false indigo will be among your perennial favorites.

Read more here: <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/baptisia/>

