



## Coming Events



October 7-21

4-H Fall Plant Sale—watch our website for details: <https://alamance.ces.ncsu.edu/>

Sat., Oct. 15, 8 a.m.- 12 p.m.

Household Hazardous Waste Collection at Holly Hill Mall

Sat., Oct. 15, 10 a.m.- 2 p.m.

Fall Celebration of Trees at Willowbrook Arboretum, Burlington

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## Bulbs: A Promise in a Tidy Package



Just as summer begins to seem only a steamy memory, can it be too soon to think about spring? Not at all! And it's not a moment too soon to get your hands on the bulbs that will burst into bloom beginning as early as February.

October is a good time to think about daffodils and other spring flowering bulbs. The bulbs are available in the garden stores now. Look for the largest bulbs of the variety you're after—the larger the bulb, the more food is available to develop blossoms. Avoid soft, lightweight or sour-smelling bulbs, which could indicate a fungal disease and the bulbs won't bloom. Buy the bulbs now for best selection, but it is best to wait until the end of October to plant them. We want to wait until the soil temperatures are below 60 degrees before planting. This gives you plenty of time to prepare the soil.



## *A host of golden daffodils*

Poorly drained soils must be amended with some type of organic soil conditioner for the bulbs to do well. Leaf compost and pine bark fines incorporated into the clay will help improve soil drainage and increase your chances of success. A two cubic foot bag of soil conditioner for every 10 square feet of bed area tilled in to a depth of six inches will make a nice loose planting bed. You should also add ½ cup of lime and 1/4 cup of slow-release fertilizer high in phosphorus, such as bone meal, per 10 square feet of bed area. Bulbs should be planted at a depth of 2-3 times their height and, of course, with the pointy side facing up.



I have seen many clumps of daffodils blooming nicely out in the country where a farm house used to be. There is usually nothing left of the old home place but the rock chimney and the daffodils. They have thrived for years without any care.

While daffodils are mostly pest free, tulips are a whole different story. Many tulip varieties will not do well here and need to be considered as annuals and planted every year. Tulips are also favored by voles and deer. Vole damage can be reduced by planting the bulbs in a plastic pot



or surrounding them with screen wire, like the cage in the picture at left. Cover the bulbs with soil—pointy side up—before closing the lid.



*This field of daffodils blooms each spring at the back of our Buster Sykes Demonstration Farm with no remaining evidence of the farm structures*

Plastic wildlife netting laid over the tulips can slow down the deer browsing. Planting tulips among daffodils may also help keep wildlife at bay.

Aside from *Narzissus* (daffodils), here are a few more not-so-tasty-to-wildlife choices: *Allium* (ornamental onion), *Galanthus* (snowdrop), *Leucojum* (snowflake), *Muscari* (grape hyacinth).



After planting, water well, then wait for the flower show!

A few points to consider after planting:

- Fertilize with a complete fertilizer, such as 5-10-5, right after bulbs bloom.
- Allow foliage of spring-blooming bulbs to die back on its own. The plants must perform photosynthesis to store food in bulb and form flower bud for next year.
- Bulbs such as daffodils, snowdrops and grape hyacinths multiply and should be divided regularly. Others, such as tulips and hyacinths, only replace the old bulb each year.
- Bulbs are best divided and transplanted when they are dormant, in late June or July.

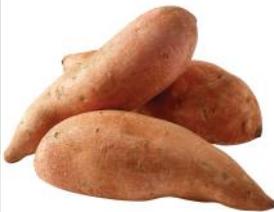
Need more answers to your gardening questions? Give us a call: 336-570-6740.



~Chris

**NC STATE**

## Extension Master Gardener



## October Garden Tips

**E**xpect the first frost around the middle of October. Before that night, bring in houseplants that have summered outdoors. Inspect them for unwanted arthropods and place the plants in a bright spot for the winter. Cut back on watering and don't fertilize.

**A**lso before frost, harvest sweet potatoes, gourds and winter squash. Pick green tomatoes and wrap them individually in newspaper to ripen at room temperature.

**T**hink spring when in the vegetable garden this month. Unless your fall garden prevents it, this is a great time to till in compost and lime and get it working over the winter. You'll be ready to plant those sugar snap peas when February 2023 rolls around.

**T**here's still time to get that free soil test to make amendments to your garden before spring. Pick up the soil test boxes and instructions at the Extension office and bring us your samples before Thanksgiving. The Master Gardeners will take the samples to the Soils Lab in Raleigh for testing.

**F**or a great lawn without excessive mowing, feed established cool-season lawns just three times – September,

November and February. Apply 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of lawn area at each feeding.

**T**o determine how much fertilizer you will need to spread to get one pound of nitrogen, you'll need to do a little garden math: The three numbers displayed on a bag of fertilizer represent the percentages of the three main nutrients (Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium) contained in that bag. For example, a bag of 17-17-17 fertilizer contains 17 percent Nitrogen, 17 percent Phosphorus and 17 percent Potassium. To apply one pound of actual nitrogen, divide 1 pound by the percentage contained in the bag; in this case, 0.17. ( $1 \div 0.17 = 5.88$ ) You will need to apply 5.88 pounds of 17-17-17 fertilizer per 1,000 square feet to achieve the recommended 1 pound of actual nitrogen.

**D**ig, divide and replant spring and summer-blooming perennials now. This includes peonies, which have a few special requirements as follows:

**U**sing a garden fork, and keeping well away from the roots, carefully dig the peony plant. The tuberous root system is brittle, so gently lift out

of the soil. Then wash away all soil and remove leaves and stems. Cover with a damp towel and let rest overnight. Using a knife, carefully cut sections with at least three eyes and plenty of roots. Replant divisions, making sure that eyes are not covered by more than one inch of soil. If planted too deeply, flowering will be reduced or possibly eliminated entirely.

**M**ove permanent potted water garden plants to deeper water by the end of the month. Keep leaves and debris out of the water, but don't overdo it. A thin layer of decomposing matter on the bottom of the pond is actually beneficial.

**C**old-loving annuals can be planted now. Sweet peas, poppies, Bells of Ireland, forget-me-nots and larkspur are just a few that can't take the heat but shine when there's a chill in the air.

**T**ake cuttings from woody herbs, dip in rooting hormone and plant in moist, well-drained medium. Lemon balm, oregano, sage, rosemary, tarragon and thyme are all good candidates for your windowsill garden.

## *Arbor Gate Plant of the Month*



### Frost Aster

### *Symphotrichum pilosum*

“Frost is coming!” announces this pretty native aster! Apt to volunteer among your other plants in the border, you’ll know it’s in the right place when it bursts into bloom with hundreds of 3/4-inch daisy-like flowers in October and hangs on until a hard freeze knocks it back. Although it may achieve 4 feet in height, frost aster is more likely to cascade appealingly over a wall, a curb, or other plants. Drought, deer and poor soil don’t discourage this survivor, but if you’re not happy with where it pops up, pull it up and compost it or relocate to a preferred site. The more sun the better, but a little bit of shade won’t hurt.

Just like its cousins, this late bloomer is loved by pollinators of every ilk and, once the blooms have faded, birds and other small wildlife will feast on the tiny seeds.

Read more here: <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/symphotrichum-pilosum/>

