TALES FROM THE CLINIC

I’ve had several calls about carpenter bees this month. Carpenter bees are large bees resembling bumble bees that drill holes in wood to make their nests. This becomes an issue when they choose to use your house or outbuildings for nesting locations. These bees are not aggressive (in fact the males don’t sting at all and the females usually only sting if handled) but they can be very intimidating due to their large size and loud buzzing.

Carpenter bees often choose to build their nests under eaves, around window trim or in wooden siding.

Carpenter bees usually don’t cause serious damage but repeat infestations can weaken wooden structures. They are attracted to bare, unpainted or weathered wood and seem to prefer softwoods like cedar, cypress or pine. Painted and pressure treated wood are less likely to be attacked by carpenter bees but they are certainly not immune.

The adult carpenter bees overwinter in the wood inside the old nest tunnels. They emerge in the spring to mate and excavate new tunnels in which they lay eggs. Larvae grow within the tunnels and a new generation of adult carpenter bees emerges from the tunnels in late summer. The longer carpenter bees colonize an area, the more damage will be done to the wood.

Controlling carpenter bees may require multiple approaches. First, paint all exposed wooden surfaces to make them less appealing. If carpenter bees are still an issue, spray an insecticide like carbaryl (Sevin) or bifenthrin (Talstar) into the holes and close them with putty, caulk or plastic wood. You may need to treat several times to get an established infestation under control. Liquid sprays of carbaryl or a synthetic pyrethroid (like permethrin) can be applied to wood surfaces as a preventive but these treatments are usually only effective for a week or two.
IN THE GARDEN NOW

Mid-May to mid-July is the time to fertilize most of our warm season lawns. It is always best to take a soil sample and have it tested before fertilizing your lawn. If you have had your soil tested, follow the test result recommendations. If you haven’t had your soil sampled yet, the soil sample turn around time is only a week this time of year so go ahead and get your sample in now. Stop by the office for directions and forms. Bring your completed soil sample back to the office and we will ship it out for you. Remember there are no fees for this service!

As temperatures heat up, your lawn may require supplemental irrigation to stay looking its best. Most turf grasses grow best with at least an inch of water per week. Put up a rain gauge and water only if necessary. Remember that deeper and less frequent watering encourages better root development so watering once a week is often recommended. If you have very sandy soil, apply a half an inch of water twice a week. Try not to water late in the day, as damp foliage is more susceptible to disease.

Most of us have our tomatoes and other warm season crops in the ground by now. I hope you chose varieties resistant to diseases common in your garden. For more information on tomatoes, please read more on my blog entry: http://impatient-gardener.blogspot.com/2011/04/tomato-tips-things-to-think-about.html

JAPANESE MAPLES
by Cyndi Lauderdale

It’s easy to fall in love with Japanese maples. In the spring and fall, the rich colors of the leaves defy description. In winter, many have bright red stems or interesting branching habits. And in the summer, a tree in full leaf is a sight to behold.

The history of the Japanese maple is as rich as the leaf color. Japan’s love affair with maples goes back to the seventh century, when the trees became the subject of poetry and art. Sadly, the lovely little trees became unexpected victims of two world wars due to food and fuel shortages. Imagine seeing your ancestor’s collection of old trees burned as firewood! Not surprisingly, many cultivars disappeared by the end of the 1940s.

Fortunately, a resurgence of interest occurred in the 1960s, and more than 320 cultivars of Acer palmatum have been developed from the original native trees. Japanese maples provide a wide range of size possibilities, from dwarf to large varieties that reach to around 30 feet tall. These maples prefer a slightly acid soil but are adaptable. They do not have invasive root systems, nor are they guilty of strong root competition so they are compatible with most plants. They do best in sandy loam with a low to medium amount of organic material and should be mulched with 2 inches of mulch. They initially have a shallow, fibrous root network, so mulch and uniform watering is needed for several years to get a tree established. Because of this shallow root system, keep grass and weeds outside the drip line to avoid competition for moisture and nutrients.

Most Japanese maples adapt well to containers and can be potted for many years without the necessity of repotting or root pruning.

I have never needed to treat for pest or disease problems. But I keep my eyes open — since insects usually found in the garden, such as aphids and spider mites, can damage Japanese maples. The worst enemy of maples is the sun, especially in the NC coastal plain.

Most cultivars do well and produce their best color in full sun, but they all benefit from some shade in the heat of the afternoon. Red cultivars of the dissectum (lace leaf) group do need some shade, but the green varieties tolerate sun very well.

And the final good news — if you enjoy wielding sharp instruments, Japanese maples thrive on pruning. You can prune a maple virtually year-round to maintain shape, but save the major work for the dormant season. Open-up the interior to prevent insect and disease problems by removing twiggy growth and reveal each tree’s beautiful branch structure. You will be rewarded!

USING NATURAL PESTICIDES
by Charlotte Glen

In the last few years, the number of natural pesticides available from local garden centers has increased. These products, derived from plants, microorganisms and other naturally occurring materials can be used to successfully control insect pests in the garden and landscape, when used properly. Simply substituting natural products in place of more traditional synthetic pesticides though rarely provides good results.

What’s Different about Natural Pesticides?
One of the biggest differences in the way natural and synthetic pesticides work is how long they last after they are applied. In general, natural pesticides break down
very quickly once applied, sometimes in less than a day. These pesticides don’t stick around long, which reduces the chances that pets, people, wildlife, or beneficial insects will be exposed to them. Unfortunately, this means these products do not provide continued pest control very long after they have been sprayed. As a result, natural pesticides usually have to be applied more frequently than synthetic products to control pest problems.

In addition, plants do not absorb most natural pesticides. They kill insect pests by either coming in direct contact with them during application or shortly thereafter, or when pests eat treated leaves. Because of this, thorough coverage of pest-infested plants is essential for good control. Since they only remain active for a short time, natural products do not prevent pest outbreaks and should only be applied when pests are present. Like all pesticides, they control pests best when populations are low, so check garden and landscape plants regularly for damaging insects and treat as soon as possible when they are found.

Most natural pesticides are less potent than their synthetic counterparts and work best as part of an integrated plant health system. This includes improving the soil to provide good growing conditions for plants; choosing plants adapted to your site conditions; applying water and nutrients when needed to prevent plant stress; and encouraging beneficial insects by planting a diversity of plants and flowers.

Which Products Control Which Pests?
Not all pests can be controlled by natural pesticides. Pests that can be effectively controlled with readily available natural pesticides include aphids, caterpillars, scale, mealy bug, whitefly, and spider mites. Most pesticides (natural or synthetic) will only control certain pests, so before applying any pesticide make sure you have the pest correctly identified and have chosen a product known to control that pest. Following are some of the most commonly available natural pesticides and the pests they control:

**Horticultural Oil** - Controls aphids, mealy bug, scale, mites, thrips, lace bug, and whitefly. These petroleum based products kill soft-bodied insects by direct contact only. Thorough coverage of the pest is essential. Follow label directions carefully - plant injury can occur in sensitive plants such as maples and redbud, and if applied at extreme temperatures.

**Insecticidal Soap** - Controls aphids, mealy bug, scale crawlers, mites, lace bug, and whitefly. Like oils, insecticidal soaps kill by direct contact only. To be effective, sprays must be applied directly to and thoroughly cover the insect pest. Some plants are sensitive – check label directions and avoid applying in extreme heat. Homemade soap sprays containing hand soap or dishwashing liquid are much more likely to injury plants than commercially available products.

**Neem Oil and Azadirachtin** - Controls aphids, mealy bug, scale crawlers, mites, thrips, and whitefly. Neem oil is derived from the seed of the neem tree, native to Southeast Asia. Azadirachtin is one of the more than 70 compounds produced by the neem tree and is thought to have the highest level of insecticidal activity. Products containing either active ingredient are available. Both are quickly broken down by sunlight.

**Spinosad** - Controls caterpillars and Colorado potato beetle, also available as fire ant bait. Spinosad is the byproduct of the fermentation of a rare type of filamentous bacteria that kills primarily through ingestion but also on contact. Spinosad is quickly broken down by sunlight but is also partially taken up by leaf tissue, providing a longer period of control than many natural pesticides (3-5 days).

**B.t.** - Controls leaf eating caterpillars. Officially known as Bacillus thuringiensis var. kurstaki, B.t. is a naturally occurring soil bacteria that effectively controls young caterpillars when eaten. This product breaks down rapidly in sunlight and is best applied in the evening or on cloudy days.

**DOWN ON THE FARM**
(Things to Do and Foods to Eat in Onslow County)

Spring is here and soon the heat of summer will be on us. Before that happens, don’t miss out on strawberry season. Strawberries are generally in season from early/mid April through May in Onslow County but strawberries don’t like hot weather – an early summer can shorten the berry season. So don’t take a chance, go out and get your strawberries now. There are several farms in Onslow County that grow strawberries. Berries can be purchased already picked or you can pick your own. This month, I’d like to introduce you to Aman Family Farms in Maysville.

Jack Aman runs Aman Family Farm and this is a true family farm. Jack’s family has owned and farmed their land on the Belgrade-Swansboro Road for over 200 years. Jack inherited the farm from his father who was born in 1877. Jack’s father raised tobacco, corn, soybeans and wheat on the land. The current farmhouse, where Jack was born, is one of the oldest houses in Onslow County dating back to the 1850s. Jack and
Sandra raised their four children on the farm. When Jack is ready to retire, their children will carry on the tradition – working the family farm. Meanwhile, Jack still farms the family land, now with the help of his son-in-law, Mike Holland. Together, they grow tobacco, corn, soybeans and wheat but in the last four or five years, they have started raising produce as well.

After the tobacco buyout, Jack looked for opportunities to diversify his farm products. He started slowly by adding watermelons to his production system the first year. The vegetable business grew rapidly and now he grows different produce throughout the season. His harvest starts out with strawberries, collards and cabbage in the spring then transitions into sweet corn, beets, onions, tomatoes, and bell peppers. Later in the summer, he picks summer squash, zucchini, watermelons and cantaloupes. The harvest season on Aman Family Farm wraps up in the fall with pumpkins, gourds and sweet potatoes.

But let’s get back to those strawberries! Now is the time to get them, before they are gone for another year. Aman Family Farm sells their fresh produce and pre-picked strawberries at the farm and the Onslow County Farmers Market. Pick your own berries are available on the farm until the season runs out. (Jack anticipates having strawberries until about the middle of May this year.) Pre-picked berries are $3 per pound and pick your own berries are $2 per pound. (A quart of strawberries weighs about 1¼ to 1½ pounds.) Whether you choose to pick your own or let Jack’s family do the work for you, check out our tips for selecting and storing strawberries.

Aman Family Farm is located at 2384 Belgrade-Swansboro Road just outside of Maysville. The farm is open 6½ days a week – from 7:30 am to 6:30 pm, Monday through Saturday and from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm on Sunday. For more information, call Jack at 910.934.2938 or Mike at 910.934.2939.

**Tips for Picking Your Own Strawberries:**

* Call before you go. The weather and the number of people picking may affect strawberry availability. Go early if you want to pick on a weekend, a busy morning can pick a field out before noon.
* Only pick fully ripe, red berries. Strawberries will not ripen after harvesting.
* Dress for the weather and bring a broad-brimmed hat. It can get hot quickly out in the field. Bring something to drink and a snack (especially if you have kids along).
* Pick strawberries carefully by pinching the stem connecting the berry to the plant with your fingernail. Don’t pull on the berry – you will bruise the berry and may damage the plant.
* Place berries in containers gently to avoid bruising.
* Do the grower a favor and if you find strawberries that have rot, sunburn or other issues, pick them and put them in the walkway between the berry rows. If they are left on the plants, they can spread rot to other berries.
* Please watch your children. Don’t let them trample the rows, climb on farm machinery or wander off.
* Dress small children in red or dark colors. Then you don’t need to worry about the inevitable stains.
* Get your berries out of the sun and cool as soon as possible.
* Strawberries will store in the refrigerator for two to three days but they will start to lose quality quickly.
* Don’t wash or hull strawberries until just before use. Any moisture, wound or bruising will make the berries more susceptible to mold during storage.
* Freeze strawberries as soon as possible for long-term storage. Wash berries, remove hulls, slice, sweeten (if desired) and freeze in freezer bags. This is a great time to use a vacuum sealer if you have one.

**Pick Your Own Strawberry Farms in Onslow County:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farm Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aman Family Farms</td>
<td>2384 Belgrade-Swansboro Rd</td>
<td>910.934.2938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Aman</td>
<td>1600 Haw Branch Road</td>
<td>(910) 324-3422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike’s Farm</td>
<td>Beulaville, NC 28518</td>
<td>(910) 347-4835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest Strawberry Farms</td>
<td>Julian Wooten</td>
<td>2053 Pony Farm Rd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some farms furnish picking containers but may charge you for them.
EVENTS AND REMINDERS

The Master Gardener Plant Clinic is open weekdays from 9-Noon and 1-4. Please come by and let us help you answer your gardening questions. The Master Gardeners are also on-hand at the Onslow County Farmers Market’s Thursday and Saturday locations.

The Onslow County Farmers Market is open for the season. Check us out on Saturdays and Tuesdays from 8:30 am to 1:30 pm behind the Onslow County Multipurpose Complex on 258 and Thursdays from noon to 6 pm on Western Boulevard behind Dick’s Sporting Goods. Become a fan of the Onslow County Farmers Market on Facebook and get weekly updates on what fresh produce is in season.

Check out Got to be NC Festival, May 20-22, 2011 go to: http://www.ncagfest.com/, for all the latest information.

RECIPE CORNER

I love the taste of fresh strawberries but, to me, they lose some of their magic when cooked in traditional jam recipes. When I was little, my parents owned a pick your own strawberry farm and my mom made loads of freezer jam to preserve that fresh-from-the-patch strawberry flavor. Freezer jams require no cooking so they are relatively quick and easy to make compared to cooked jams. However, as their name implies, these jams need to be stored in the freezer until you are ready use them.

I still make and enjoy strawberry freezer jam each season but now I make mine with a universal pectin. Traditional pectin requires a prescribed amount of sugar for the jam to set. You can’t adjust traditional jam recipes and expect them to set normally. Universal pectin gives you flexibility and allows you to adjust the recipe. You can reduce the amount of sugar, use sugar substitutes, sweeten your jam with honey or just use fruit. Pomona’s Universal Pectin is one readily available brand. Universal pectin can often be found at health food stores. Always read the directions of the brand you buy and follow their directions.

The recipe below can be adjusted to suit your tastes.

No-Cook Strawberry Freezer Jam

You will need:
* 4 cups mashed strawberries (wash, hull and mash 2 quarts of room temperature strawberries)
* ½ cup honey or 1 cup sugar (use more or less to suit your taste) or sweetener of your choice to taste
* ¼ cup water
* 3 teaspoons pectin powder
* 4-12 teaspoons calcium water

Steps to take:
* Make your calcium water. Universal pectin comes with a small packet of calcium. This is required for the pectin to jell. Before you start, put ½ teaspoon of calcium powder and ½ cup of water in a small clean jar with a lid. Shake well before using. Calcium water can be stored in the fridge for several months.
* Wash and rinse freezer safe, air tight 8 oz containers.
* Prepare fruit and measure into a large bowl.
* Measure honey, sugar or sugar substitute, add to fruit and stir well.
* Bring water to a boil, carefully put it in a blender/food process and add pectin powder. Blend 1-2 minutes until all powder is dissolved. (I put a folded kitchen towel over the top of the blender to prevent any hot liquid from splashing out when I open the lid.)
* Carefully add hot liquid pectin to fruit and stir well until mixed.
* Add 4 teaspoons calcium water and stir well. If fruit doesn’t start to jell, continue adding calcium water 1 teaspoon at a time until the fruit starts to jell. It will set more softly than cooked jam.
* Fill containers to within ½ inch of the top. Put on lids. Store in freezer immediately.
* Refrigerate after thawing.
* The directions say it will last about 1 week in the refrigerator. I wouldn’t know, mine never lasts that long.

This recipe will yield 5-6 cups of jam but can easily be doubled.

CONTACT US

If you have questions about lawn, landscape, or garden problems, contact your local Cooperative Extension office. In Onslow County call 455.5873, Mon – Fri, 8 am and 5 pm, or visit us online anytime at http://onslow.ces.ncsu.edu. While you are there, you can post your questions to be answered by email using the ‘Ask an Expert’ widget (in the upper left hand corner).
The 4-H motto is:

“To Make the Best Better”, so make the best better by enrolling now to learn something new and meet new people. The 4-H office along with those giving leadership to the activities hope you have an enjoyable summer and invite youth age 5 – 19 to take advantage of the many opportunities offered in the Avenues of Interest Summer Program.

We invite you to join us for an exciting summer!!! Any youth in Onslow County may enroll in one or more workshops, you do not have to be a 4-H’er to register, just come by the 4-H office at 4024 Richlands Highway, Jacksonville. Call us at 455-5873 or you can also check our web site to see what classes we offer and if they are full. (http://onslow.ces.ncsu.edu) All programs have a registration fee, which must be paid when you register. Registration will not be held at the workshop or activity.

All monies collected are used for supplies and or instructor fees. Again, do not miss out on an exciting summer of 4-H activities.