JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2009

EVENTS ON THE HORIZON

JANUARY 9: Onslow County Master Gardener Monthly Meeting: Onslow County Complex, 4024 Richlands Hwy. Jacksonville. 9:00 am - 11:00 am.

JANUARY 13: Onslow County Beekeepers Assoc. Monthly Meeting: Onslow County Complex, 4024 Richlands Hwy. Jacksonville. 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm.

FEBRUARY 9: Onslow County Beekeepers Assoc. Monthly Meeting: Onslow County Complex, 4024 Richlands Hwy. Jacksonville. 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm.

FEBRUARY 17: Master Gardener Course Begins: Onslow County Multipurpose Complex, 4024 Richlands Hwy., Jacksonville. Meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00 am - Noon through April 9th. Call 455-5873 for application. Course Fee. Limited enrollment.

LOOKING BACK

A year ago I wrote about the plight of the disappearing honey bee known as “Colony Collapse Disorder”. A lot of research has been conducted by 5-6 cooperating Land Grant Universities across the United States, like NCSU, during the past year. There are still many unanswered questions and unknowns. However, it has been proven that telephone cell towers were not causing the problem as rumored by some folks. Also, contrary to what many environmentalists believed, the systemic insecticide, imidacloprid, has also been pretty much ruled out. Poor honey bee nutrition and stress from migratory movements by commercial pollinators are still being investigated. The real focus recently has been on a new strain of Nosema, a protozoan that infects the digestive tract of honey bees. In the past Nosema apis has caused moderate discomfort/diarrhea to honey bees when it occurs in colonies. Researchers have discovered a more virulent strain, Nosema cerana, in colonies showing collapse and now believe it might possibly be the real culprit. Research is still ongoing to verify if this is really the case as some believe.
If red is the only color that comes to mind when you think of poinsettias then it may be time for you to visit your local garden center! Today there are over 100 different varieties of poinsettias available in a diversity of colors including white, pink, rose, coral, salmon, and every tint of red, crimson, and scarlet imaginable. There is even a purple variety on the market known as Plum Pudding TM! Variety does not stop just with color either. Poinsettias can be found with leaves edged and frosted in white and with petal-like bracts that are marbled, dusted, or splashed in multiple colors. There is even a series known as ‘Winter Rose’ whose bracts are pleated and incurved so that they actually do resemble rose flowers. Whether you stayed with a traditional red variety this Christmas or tried one of the newer color creations, the following quick tips will help you get the most out of your poinsettia this holiday season.

**Selecting Healthy Plants** - When picking out poinsettias, first look for plants that have lots of dark green foliage from top to bottom. Plants that have yellowing or fallen lower leaves will not last as long as those whose lower leaves are still dark green. Next look at the plant’s bracts - these are the large colorful leaves that resemble petals. Choose plants with bracts that are undamaged and brightly colored. Take care when transporting poinsettias, which can be damaged by exposure to cold temperatures even for only a brief time. Because of their tropical origins, poinsettias dislike the cold and should be kept at temperatures above 50 degrees at all times. Once home, choose a location that is brightly lit and free of cold or hot drafts. Plants kept in an area that stays between 55 and 75 degrees will continue to look good the longest.

**Poinsettia Care** - Poinsettias like to stay evenly moist - never completely dry or sitting in standing water, though they are often displayed sitting in decorative foil coverings or ornamental containers that do not have drainage holes in the bottom. Be sure to take your poinsettia out of these types of decorative pots before watering. Water your poinsettia whenever the surface of the soil appears dry and the plant feels light when you lift it. The best way to water a poinsettia is to place it in a sink and add water until it begins to drip out of the bottom of the pot. Allow the plant to remain in the sink until all extra water has drained out of the pot and then place it back into its ornamental container. If your poinsettia is sitting in a container with a saucer underneath, pour out any extra water the saucer captures after watering. There is no need to fertilize poinsettias until after Christmas since most plants sold have enough nutrients in their soil to keep them happy for at least 30 days. You also do not have to worry about keeping poinsettia plants away from pets, children, or hungry relatives because despite common belief, poinsettias are not poisonous! This is just an urban legend that began in the early 1920’s and continues to persist, though people with sensitive skin may develop a slight rash after coming in contact with the white sap produced in all parts of poinsettia plants.

**Poinsettias After the Holidays** - While it is possible to keep poinsettias living year after year, for the majority of us the most realistic thing to do with a poinsettia after it starts to look bad is to add it to the compost pile. For those with a green thumb, keeping poinsettias going from year to year is not too difficult. Poinsettias are perennials and in the tropical highlands of southern Mexico where they are native, poinsettias grow as large shrubs that
naturally bloom in December. To keep your poinsettia alive until next Christmas place it in a warm, brightly lit area after the holidays. Cut off the flowers once the bracts begin to fade and start fertilizing it once a month with a water soluble fertilizer. When all threat of frost has passed in spring poinsettias can be placed outside in a partially shaded location until fall. Cut plants back to four to six inches tall in spring and pinch the tips a few times over the summer to encourage bushy growth. To get poinsettias to bloom in time for Christmas, bring them back inside by the end of September and provide them with at least 13 hours of uninterrupted darkness every night, but be sure to bring the plant back out into the light each day. These long periods of darkness are needed to initiate flowering. Poinsettia plants should begin to bloom after nine to 11 weeks of long night treatment.

Learn More! - To find out more about the care of poinsettias, see the online fact sheet available from NC Cooperative Extension at http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/pdf/hil-8508.pdf.


Find out about the history of poinsettia cultivation and read the legend of the poinsettia here: http://www.paulercepoinsettias.com/html/hist_fset.html.


SOIL SAMPLE FOR HEALTHY PLANTS

The fall and winter months are an excellent time to submit a soil test. A soil test is a process completed by the NC Dept. of Agriculture Soil Lab, whereby the nutrients are chemically removed from the soil and measured for their plant available content. The quantity of nutrients extracted are used to determine the amount and type of fertilizer needed. The pH or acidity of the soil samples is also measured and used to determine if and how much lime is needed.

To submit a sample, it is critical that the sample represents the area to be tested. This is best achieved by taking 8-10 DRY sub-samples at random using a shovel or trowel and combining them together in a plastic bucket. Take the sub-samples 4 inches deep for lawns and 6 - 8 inches deep for gardens, shrubs, etc.

Mix these sub-samples together well and bring a pint of this composite sample by the county plant clinic at the Onslow County Cooperative Extension Office located in the County Multipurpose Complex at 4024 Richlands Hwy. A separate composite sample can be submitted for different areas of the lawn or landscape. Be sure to label the samples so you can identify where they came from when you receive the soil test report in the mail. The samples can be brought to the Cooperative Extension office in any type of container. At our office they will be transferred to soil test boxes and an information sheet filled out.

Normally soils should be tested every 2-3 years. However, if a problem develops that could be soil related then have a sample submitted and analyzed. The test is a free service. Reports are usually received in 2-4 weeks depending on the time of year. Once the report is received, call the extension office and speak with an agricultural agent for assistance with understanding its recommendations.
TRANSPLANTING TREES AND SHRUBS

When is the best time to transplant trees and shrubs? The fall and winter months (Nov - Feb) are the best time of the year to dig up and transplant trees and shrubs. The more of the root system transplanted (the larger the root ball) the greater the chance of success. Since transplanting does greatly reduce the existing root system it is often advisable to cut back the size of the top part of the plant by a third in order to help maintain a better shoot to root ratio. Root pruning the plant 6 months before transplanting (cutting the roots on two opposite sides) increases the chance of success. Keeping the transplanted plant watered well the first year is also critical.

GRAPE VINES BLEEDING WHEN PRUNED

How do I keep my grape vines from bleeding when being pruned? Grapes are going to bleed or ooze sap in the spring when the sap rises no matter when they are pruned, but it does not hurt the plant. Pruning early winter causes less bleeding than pruning later winter. However, vines pruned late winter are less susceptible to cold injury so late winter pruning is preferred.

SCORPIONS

Are there scorpions occurring naturally in our area? In general, no. The only NC Native scorpion is the one inch long “southern unstriped scorpion” which occurs in some western NC mountain counties. Occasionally, it and a couple of other non-native scorpions have been accidentally introduced into other regions of the state. Several species of very tiny, pseudo scorpions do exist in our region, but you would have to have sharp eyes to notice them and they do not possess a stinger.

BUILDING YOUR REFERENCE LIBRARY


Jeff Morton
Extension Agent
Horticulture.

SPOTLIGHT

Onslow County Master Gardener Volunteer Program

The Master Gardener Volunteer Program is a joint endeavor of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service and volunteers who wish to learn how to be better gardeners and help other gardeners by sharing their knowledge. The program is designed to recruit and train volunteers to help meet the educational needs of the citizens of Onslow County.

The term ‘gardening’ is used in a broad sense. It includes, vegetables, fruits, lawn grasses, shrubs, flowers and trees. The training focuses on developing diagnostic skills for insects and diseases of plants. Classes are also given on landscaping for water quality, soils, composting, propagation, wildlife control and much, much more!

As a Master Gardener, you will receive 40 hours of intensive horticultural training.

After graduation you will be expected to provide an equivalent amount of volunteer work in the community. Examples of the types of activities that you can choose to perform
are: answering homeowner inquiries at the Extension Office; mailing out information bulletins to homeowners, conducting plant clinics, working with elementary school children on special horticultural projects, talking to Garden Clubs, advising on community beautification projects and writing newsletter articles.

The volunteer work is fun and interesting, and you will not be required to do anything with which you are not comfortable. Master Gardeners make ‘friends for life’ and enjoy working and learning together.

The 2009 Master Gardener course will begin February 17th and end April 9th. Classes normally will be taught Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9:00 – Noon. Cost for the course is $75.00 which includes a comprehensive Master Gardener Manual that you keep.

If you would be interested in receiving an application for the 2009 course, please call the North Carolina Cooperative Extension – Onslow County Center at (910) 455-5873, and leave your name, address and phone number. Enrollment will be limited, so inquire early.