EVENTS ON THE HORIZON

JANUARY 12: Onslow County Beekeepers Assoc. Monthly Meeting:
Onslow County Complex, 4024 Richlands Hwy., Jacksonville. 7:00 - 9:00 pm.

JANUARY 14: Onslow County Master Gardeners Monthly Meeting: Onslow County Complex, 4024 Richlands Hwy., Jacksonville. 9:00 - 11:00 am.

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

FEBRUARY 16: Onslow County Beekeepers Assoc. Monthly Meeting: Onslow County Complex, 4024 Richlands Hwy., Jacksonville. 7:00 - 9:00 pm.


LOOKING BACK

On November 7th, the Onslow County Master Gardeners held their second annual Camellia Flower Show, Sale and Seminar. By all accounts it was a huge success. Over 400 of the most beautiful camellia blooms were on display of all sizes, forms, and colors. They were simply breathtaking in their variety. The seminars were relevant and interesting. Twenty five different cultivars of camellias (sasanquas and japonicas) were on sale and we sold over 200 of them! Many thanks goes to the dedicated group of Master Gardeners who worked so hard to make it possible under the leadership of Jim Van Gorder and his wife Sally. It all would not have been possible without the support of the Tidewater Camellia Chapter, Bill Howell, Cam Too Camellia Nursery, the American Camellia Society, the numerous judges, many of whom traveled a long distance to be here and Debby King, Horticultural Secretary here with the Cooperative Extension office. Plans are to make this an annual event to be held the first Saturday in November of each year, so be ready for Saturday, November 6th, 2010.
DIGGING UP THE DIRT

PLANTS AND COLD INJURY
BY: Charlotte Glen, Horticulture Agent, Pender County

The leaves of cold damaged plants may turn partially or completely brown. It is best to wait until spring when new growth begins to prune these plants back. Keeping plants properly watered and fertilized during the growing season can help prevent cold damage by boosting plants’ natural hardiness.

Out in the Cold: Plants and Cold Injury

Cold weather damage, often referred to as winter injury, is not uncommon in eastern North Carolina lawns and landscapes, even though our climate is relatively mild. Winter injury can show up as brown leaves on evergreens, dead patches in lawns, twig dieback on trees and shrubs, and in extreme cases, complete death of a plant. In most cases, extremely cold temperatures are not the cause of plant injury during our winters. Instead, it is usually a combination of fluctuating or unseasonable temperatures along with factors related to plant care and health that lead to most of the winter injury experienced in our area. While little can be done to moderate temperature changes, there are some things we can do year round to help our lawns and landscapes tolerate cold better, as well as to help prevent cold damage and speed its recovery.

Understanding Cold Hardiness

All plants have a natural, inborn ability to tolerate a certain level of cold, but the amount of cold any plant can tolerate varies from one species to another. To help gardeners and landscapers choose plants tolerant of their area’s winter temperatures the US Department of Agriculture developed the Plant Hardiness Zone Map which divides the country into different zones based on the expected winter minimum temperature for that area. Temperature zones range from 1 (absolute coldest with winter temperatures below negative 50) to 11 (the warmest zones, where temperatures stay above 40). Most of eastern NC falls into either zone 7b or 8a, meaning we can expect a winter minimum between 5 and 15 degrees.

When purchasing plants, look for the Hardiness Zone rating listed on their tag. Plants rated zone 7 or lower should survive our winter temperatures with no damage. Sometimes, though, plants that are rated perfectly hardy in our area will experience some winter injury because they are not completely prepared when cold weather arrived. For plants to tolerate cold temperatures, they must adjust to temperature change over a period of time. This adjustment is known as acclimation. Sudden changes in temperature, especially when several mild winter days in the 0’s or 70’s are followed by a sharp drop into the 20’s, can catch plants unprepared and result in winter injury. Cold weather very early in season, such as that experienced this past November, as well as late spring frosts, like the devastating Easter freeze of 2007, are also very damaging to plants because they are not prepared to endure such cold temperature at that point in their growth cycle.

Avoiding Cold Damage

Pruning plants in late summer or early fall can make them more susceptible to winter injury because the new growth that results in response to pruning does not have enough time to acclimate for winter. For this reason it is best not to prune plants back after mid summer, to ensure their new growth has enough time to harden off for winter. Applying nitrogen containing fertilizers in fall or winter can also increase winter damage by encouraging tender new growth. Avoid putting out nitrogen fertilizers after mid to late summer to reduce the possibility of winter damage. Other nutrients help increase plants’ cold hardiness especially potassium, often referred to as potash. To find out if your soil is low in potassium, submit a soil sample to your local Cooperative Extension office for testing. Soil testing is free to NC residents and is the only way to accurately know which nutrients your soil needs. Potassium applied during the spring and summer will help plants prepare for winter.

Plants growing in containers are more susceptible to cold damage than those planted in the ground. When temperatures below 25 are predicted, bring containers into a garage or under a porch overnight or wrap them in bubble wrap or some other type of insulating material. If a sudden drop in temperature is expected, plants that are prone to winter damage like sago palms, can be protected by being covered with a quilt, sheet, or special synthetic fabrics made for frost protection, such as Reemay garden blanket. When covering plants, be sure they are covered completely and their cover extends to the ground to trap heat in from the soil. Also be sure to remove any coverings the next morning. Watering
plants deeply a day or two before very cold weather can help reduce damage as well, since moist soil holds more heat than dry soil. This is only though if soil conditions are dry and care should be taken not to keep plants waterlogged through the winter.

If your plants show signs of winter damage it is best to wait until spring before pruning out any damaged wood. Waiting until new growth begins makes it much easier to tell how far back plants need to be pruned. To find out if a plant has experienced winter injury before spring, carefully scrape the bark off a few small twigs. If the wood underneath appears green, then that part of the plant is alive. If it is brown, then that part of the plant has died and you should try scraping lower down on the branch to see how far back the tissue has been killed.

Learn More!
Learn more about cold damage and how to prevent it from these great sources:
NCU: Protecting Plants from Cold Damage http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-604.html
Clemson: Cold Damage http://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheets/hgic2350.htm
University of Florida: Cold Protection of Ornamental Plants http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG025

5 REASONS TO NOT TOP THAT TREE
What’s Wrong with Topping?

This is the time of year when professionally ignorant and antiquated ‘tree surgeons’ may try to convince you to top your trees for ‘safety reasons’. Tree topping produces anything but a safe tree in the long run and should never be done except in rare situations by competent tree pruners.

1. It Won’t Work! Topping won’t work to keep trees small. After a deciduous tree is topped, its growth rate increases. It grows back rapidly in an attempt to replace its missing leaf area. It needs all of its leaves so that it can manufacture food for the trunk and roots. It won’t slow down until it reaches about the same size it was before it was topped. It takes at maximum just a few years before your tree returns to near its original size. The only reason this will not occur is if you damage a tree’s health so it hasn’t the strength to re-establish itself. It is, in effect, dying and will continue on a downward spiral for years. Topping can’t make a significant reduction in size for long. The species or type of tree you have determines its size.

2. It’s Expensive. A topped tree must be pruned and re-pruned every few years, and eventually must be removed when it dies or the owner gives up. Each time a branch is cut, numerous long, skinny young shoots (called suckers or watersprouts) grow rapidly back to replace it. They must be cut and recut, but they always regrow the next year making the job more difficult. A properly pruned tree does not stimulate an upsurge of regrowth. Proper pruning actually improves the health and beauty of a tree, costing you less in the long run.

3. It’s Ugly. The sight of a topped tree is offensive to many people. The freshly sawed-off tree limbs are reminiscent of arm or leg amputations. And the freshly-sawed look is just the beginning of the eyesore; the worst is yet to come, as the tree regrows a witch’s broom of ugly, straight suckers and sprouts. The natural beauty of the tree’s crown is a function of the uninterrupted taper from the trunk to ever finer and more delicate branches, and the regular division of the branches.

4. It’s Dangerous. Topping is the most serious injury you can inflict upon your tree. Severe topping and repeat topping can set up internal columns of rotten wood, the ill effect of which may show up years later in conjunction with a drought or other stress. Ironically, many people top their trees because they think it will make them safer. Topping creates hazardous trees. Topping creates a hazardous tree in four ways:

• IT ROTTS. Topping opens the tree up to an invasion of rotting organisms. A tree can defend itself from rot when side branches are removed, but it has a hard time walling off the pervasive rot to which a topping cut subjects it. Rotted individual limbs or the
entire tree may fail as a result, often years later.

- **IT STARVES.** Very simply, a tree’s leaves manufacture its food. Repeated removal of the tree’s leaves, its food source, literally starves the tree. This makes it susceptible to secondary diseases such as root rot—a common cause of failing trees.

- **WEAK LIMBS.** New limbs made from the sucker or shoot regrowth are weakly attached and break easily in wind or snow storms— even many years later when they are large and heavy. A regrown limb never has the structural integrity of the original.

- **INCREASED WIND RESISTANCE.** The thick regrowth of suckers or sprouts resulting from topping make the tree top-heavy and more likely to catch the wind. This increases the chance of blow-down in a storm. Selectively thinned trees allow the wind to pass through the branches.

5. **Makes You Look Bad.** Topping makes you appear to be a cruel or foolish person to people who know better than to use this terrible practice. If the tree is too large for its location then the better recourse would be to remove the tree entirely and replace it with another smaller species.

**TALES FROM THE CLINIC**

**MOLE CRICKETS REVISITED**

In the last month, quite a few people have observed areas in their lawn where the turf appears to be dying or dead. They also see soil that appears to be disturbed and possibly small holes occasionally. In most cases, this has proven to be mole cricket activity. To determine IF this is the problem, drench one or two small areas with 5 gallons of water to which you have added several squirts of lemon scented dish soap. Wait 3-5 minutes and if present, the mole crickets will crawl to the surface and try to crawl away. They will look like our regular black field cricket, except be larger, grey to dark brown in color, and their front feet look like flat paddles or shovels. IF detected you can treat the soil now with bifenthrin or fipronil. However, to obtain effective control, be sure to retreat the affected areas next year in early June when they start their lifecycle over and are more easily controlled.

**BUILDING YOUR REFERENCE LIBRARY**


**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 inquires 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 2010 Master Gardener course will begin February 16th and end March 18th. Classes normally will be taught Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings from 9:00 - Noon. Cost for the course is $100.00 which includes a comprehensive Master Gardener Manual that you keep.

If you would be interested in receiving an application for the 2010 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.