NOW IS THE TIME

December 2011
✦ Prepare trees and shrubs for the winter by replenishing mulch to protect shallow roots. Add 2 ½ to 3 inches of chopped leaves, bark or pine straw, keeping mulch away from trunks to minimize vole damage.
✦ Prune back flowering perennials including daisies, asters, penstemons, rubeckias and cardinal flowers. Prune evergreen shrubs and deciduous shrubs that do not flower in the spring. Wait, however, until after spring blooms have faded before pruning spring blooming azaleas, lilacs and forsythias.
✦ Dig up dahlia tubers before the ground freezes. Store tubers in moist sand in a cool, dark place. Check periodically and remove any dried up or rotten ones.
✦ Rake beds for a final time to clear any diseased material. Only healthy plant debris should be composted.
✦ Now is a great time to do a soil test. Results come by email which can be printed out for future reference. (Boxes and instructions are available for free at the extension office.)

Average daily temperature average: high/low 50/28°F, Precipitation monthly total: 5.12”

UPCOMING EVENTS

12/09/11 1:00pm-4:00pm Holidays Naturally Bullington Center-698-6104
12/10/11 10:00am-4:00pm Holidays Naturally Bullington Center-698-6104
01/07/12 1:00pm-4:00pm Grafting Workshop Bullington Center-698-6104**
01/26/12 10:00am-12:00pm Terrarium Workshop Bullington Center-698-6104**
01/31/12 3:00pm-4:00pm Growing & Caring for Orchids Bullington Center-698-6104**
02/09/12 3:00pm-4:00pm Restoring the King of the Forest Bullington Center-698-6104**

More classes available throughout the year contact us for detail 698-6104

Person with disabilities and persons with limited English proficiency may request accommodations to participate in activities mentioned in this newsletter, please contact the extension office at 828-697-4891 during business hours at least 5 days prior to the event to discuss accommodations. **fee required
Adding compost to your garden is a great way to improve your soil’s structure while providing a continual slow-release source of nutrients for your plants. Structure is vital to soil productivity because it ensures good aeration, good drainage and good water retention. Compost is essential in maintaining any organic garden.

Generally the heat generated within the compost pile breaks down the organic material within a few months. But in the winter the inside of the pile is barely warm. Therefore, many gardeners neglect composting during the winter months. In nature, however, composting is a continuous activity with organic matter decomposing throughout the winter, albeit at a slower pace. Other factors play a part in making compost. Microbes, fungi, good bacteria and mycelia are all at work breaking down organic material into rich humus despite the cooler temperatures. In fact too much heat actually slows down and even kills the microbial life within the pile.

So, be patient and continue composting. Throughout the winter layer vegetable scraps, fall leaves, a shovelful of dirt now and then and even small amounts of manure if available. By the time you are ready to plant your tomatoes, you will have plenty of winter compost ready to work into your garden.

January 2012
✦ Check perennials for signs of frost heaving. Press down firmly around the base of any plants that have lifted.
✦ Put wind barriers around sensitive shrubs and put wire mesh around tender stems to prevent girdling.
✦ Dig up dahlia tubers before the ground freezes. Store tubers in moist sand in a cool, dark place. Check periodically and remove any dried up or rotten ones.
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Weather daily temperature average: high/low 50/28F, Precipitation monthly total: 4.72”

February 2012
✦ Apply fertilizer to cool season grasses in mid-month. Use one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.
✦ Control winter lawn weeds with broad leaf herbicide or for a more organic approach, remove broad leaf weeds manually.
✦ Cut branches of pussy willow, forsythia and flowering quince for indoor forcing.
✦ Check stored bulbs and tubers for possible rot.
✦ Plant fruit trees, grape vines, small fruits and asparagus crowns.
✦ Complete catalog orders for nursery stock and seeds.
✦ Start seeds under grow light at the end of the month using sterile planting medium.
✦ Toward the end of the month plant some cool weather vegetables.

Weather daily temperature average: high/low 52/29F, Precipitation monthly total: 4.70”
**WINTER FRUIT TREE PRUNING**

The middle of winter is a great time to prune dead, diseased or damaged branches from fruit trees. Dormancy allows for more drastic pruning. Also, without all that foliage it is visually easier to correct the shape and size of the tree. Winter pruning will also improve flowering and fruit production.

General pruning guidelines additionally include removing water sprouts and suckers, excessive vegetative growth at the top and bottom, respectively, of the tree. Eliminate competition between branches that grow into each other or toward the center of the tree. Eliminate narrow or sharp-angled branches and remove growth that is below horizontal (anything angled toward the ground). Also remove low branches that touch the ground. By training trees to an open center you optimize light distribution within the tree. More light equals more fruit. Refer to The North Carolina Master Gardener Training Manual for more information regarding pruning of each type of fruit tree.

Fruit trees can be susceptible to a variety of diseases, bacteria, fungal infections and blight. It is a good idea to treat dormant trees in January and again just before the buds begin to open. Liquid copper fungicide is safe for organic production.

**PLANNING YOUR VEGETABLE GARDEN**

Before you put in your first seed or transplant, it is important that you have an overall plan for your garden. In Henderson County it is possible to grow food crops year-round. Vegetables are generally either cool weather or warm weather crops. In late winter/early spring plant radishes, lettuces, spinach, Swiss chard, turnips, kale, carrots, beets and onions. Plant these in succession every two weeks or so for a continuous supply of fresh vegetables. (You don’t want everything to become ripe at once.) As the weather warms, replace the last of the harvested cool weather vegetables with warm weather crops such as beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, eggplant and peppers. Again, re-plant your vegetables every two weeks or so to stretch out your harvest.

As the summer winds down, replace the finished warm weather crops again with cool weather ones. Plan a third round of cool weather crops under protective cover beginning in late November.

Keep in mind that many vegetables grow best when companioned with certain other vegetables. There are books or information available online for help on what plants should be planted next to each other and which should be kept away from each other. Be sure to check with the extension office as well.

The Henderson County Cooperative Extension wishes you and your family a very happy and healthy Holiday Season and a happy New Year!

Please join us in wishing Diane Turner and her family much happiness and success in her new adventure with her move to Minnesota!
Garden Plugs

A newsletter for Henderson County Gardeners

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