

# The Clod-Hopper



Volume 28 Edition 4 Gardeners of Wake County, Inc. – Raleigh, NC

APRIL 2012

## AZALEA SALE

The longest club meeting of the year is the week of April 9. It begins with the unloading of plants on Monday and ends when the last plant gets sold and the garden area is clean. That is usually late Sunday afternoon – but if we have some very good salesmen in the crowd we could end earlier! We have added 8 Rhododendron hybrids and some “native” deciduous azaleas



to the list of available plants this year.

There is a sign-up system on the website for you to volunteer if you have not already done so or you can call Bob Hartgrove. If you don't get around to signing up you can always show up; there will be something for you to do! There are several trucks to be

unloaded on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday; Thursday morning is setting up for the sale and the “members only” sale is Thursday afternoon.

Remember, the income from our sale helps fund our horticulture scholarships. Spread the word among your friends about the great plant sale April 13-15.

Other groups will be selling plants as well. The Raleigh Garden Club will be selling plants other than azaleas and will also have herbs for sale. The 4-H youth group will have their Camellia sale — and probably something else. Remember the great strawberries they had last year! The Pilot Club will sell plants other than geraniums this year.

## PRUNING

Jeff Kish of Bartlett Tree Service in Raleigh had some excellent photographs of the good, bad and ugly trees before and after pruning. He reminded us there are four major objectives of pruning: define the structure of the tree, control the

development of the tree, maintenance and restoration of damaged plants. Cuts are made on the tree or shrub to clean the center of the plant, raise the canopy and thin growth.



Those of us who were taught to “paint” the cut wounds to help the tree heal were told to stop that practice, but pay more attention to how and where the limbs are cut. Cuts are made with a sharp saw or loppers at an adjoining

*(Continued on page 2)*

## CLUB MEETINGS

**Meetings are at 7:30pm at the JC Raulston Arboretum**

**Apr. 17** April 17 Vermi-Composting and Casting Teas. Greg Morris

**May 15** Picnic at 6:00 at Mark Boone's House

**June 19** Tim Alderton “JCRA Through the Seasons”

**July 17** Dick and Judith Tyler of Pine Knott Farms

## MARCH BUSINESS MEETING

There were guests and new members at the March meeting. The names of the new members are in the New Member block and their address information will be in the directory. There are still several members who have not paid their dues. If you are one of them, please get your check to Carole quickly so you can be included in the Directory. There is not a membership blank in this issue because we need the space for spring gardening information.

Information on the next meeting is in the “meeting block” on the front page. If you have suggestions for field trips, please get in touch with Mark Boone. The May 15th meeting is our annual picnic. It will be held at Mark Boone's. as it was last year. The cost is \$5/person and you are asked to bring a dessert or appetizer. It will be a “Pig Pickin’” that begins at 6 pm.



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[www.gardenersofwakecounty.org](http://www.gardenersofwakecounty.org)

### PRUNING *(continued from page 1)*

stem or trunk. The best technique for removing limbs is to use the "3-cut" system.

Make the first cut from the bottom of the limb at least 3 inches from the trunk. That cut should go 1/3 to 2/3 the diameter of the branch. The second cut is a few inches outside that cut to remove the limb. With that first cut made at the bottom of the limb you have removed the danger of tearing the bark off the trunk of the tree when the limb falls. The third cut is the "finishing cut". That removes the stub. Jeff had slides to show the raised areas where the "branch bark collar" and "branch bark ridge" are formed where limbs join. A final cut made just outside that diagonal line allows the tree to heal over without the application of paint.

Trees are a major component of our landscaping and managing them properly will add to the value of our property, provide shade and our enjoyment of our landscape. Most trees live for more years than we will live; the first third of their life they are growing, the second third they need to be maintained to keep their health and the last third they are declining.

Many of us have a problem deciding which of the lateral limbs should be removed and which should be left. For the best shape of the tree we need to remove the small diameter laterals and retain those that are above 50% of the size of the dominant stem. Many people remove the lower branches too early in the life of the tree. Most mature trees have a better shape with about 2/3 canopy and 1/3 stem or trunk.



For a quick reminder on pruning shrubs, don't shear them. Make cuts back into the center of the plant to reduce the size of the plant and thin the plant so air and light can reach the center. It may take a little longer, but the results last longer and opening the center of the plant reduces problems from insects and diseases. Also remember when pruning a hedge, it should be narrow at the top and broader at the bottom. When it is narrow at the bottom light doesn't get to the stems and the lower branches may die.



**New Members**

**Curt Renz, Cary**

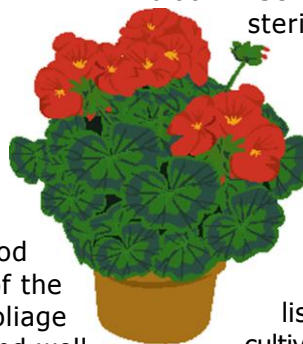
**Mack Haywood, Cary**

## GROWING GERANIUMS

The June issue of Fine Gardening has a feature article on geraniums. Most of us think immediately of the bedding geraniums or hanging baskets — usually bright red — that decorate our yard and front porch during the summer. They are “tender” plants, correctly named *Pelargonium*, that are killed with a hard frost. If you are growing “*Pelargoniums*” this year remember to keep them deadheaded for continuous bloom. Just break the bloom stalk from the plant stem when the blooms fade.

They will need an application of fertilizer about every 8 weeks to encourage new growth and bloom. Keep them watered and if you are going to be away for more than a week during the summer it would be

wise to have someone check on the plants to make sure they stay moist. The Fine Gardening article dealt with the true geranium (often called “Cranesbill Geraniums”), hardy (and sometimes native) plants that survive in outdoor beds. They grow in full sun to light shade. They prefer alkaline soil so adding lime in our area is required. They don’t like “wet feet” so good drainage is a must. Many of the plants have beautiful fall foliage color. Most cultivars respond well to shearing after their blooms period to encourage new growth and a new set of blooms. The shearing also reduces the seeds from the flowers — and some cultivars may become invasive.



There are selections available in several of the local garden centers and Plant Delights Nursery lists eight cultivars in their catalog. One has gold foliage and a violet colored bloom. Several cultivars are also

sterile so there won't be a problem with excessive spreading. Niche Gardens lists a cultivar 'Dilys' that has fragrant flowers and foliage. Lazy S Farm Nursery in Barboursville, Va.

lists several recommended cultivars on their website [www.lazysfarms.com](http://www.lazysfarms.com). You

might want to check the ratings of the plants in the June issue of “Fine Gardening” before you purchase any of these plants for your garden.

## STRAWBERRIES

With the increased cost of strawberries at the grocery store this year lots of gardeners are getting more interested in growing their own. We do have several good “pick-your-own” farms in our area where you can pick enough for current eating and freezing or canning. Since they don't weigh you before and after you arrive at the garden you can taste the fruit before you pick too large a quantity.



Strawberries can be grown in raised beds or in clay strawberry jars if you just want some fresh berries for a week or two. The need soil rich in organic matter and good drainage for the best results. There are three major “types” of strawberries: June bearing, Day-neutral and ever-bearing. The “June bearing” types such as Earliglow and Jewel are

planted in early spring, dead-headed to remove blooms the first year and encourage plant growth for the next year's crop.

Day neutral plants produce fruit in two or three small crops a season. Ever bearing cultivars produce continuously through the spring and summer growing season. They are probably the best selection for strawberry jars. Again, the bearing life of the plants will be longer if the plants are not allowed to produce runners or berries the first year in the ground. Both of these types may be planted in either spring or fall.

The Co-operative Extension Service has a good publication on strawberries so check with the local office or ask your favorite Master Gardener to get a copy for you.

## SPRING CLEANING

The azaleas and camellias have almost finished blooming so it is time to prune the plants. Remove dead limbs, crossing limbs and those that grow to the inside of the plant. It is a good idea to pick up spent camellia blooms to prevent possible disease problems. To prevent unwanted camellia seedlings and squirrels damaging plants by gnawing the seed pods you may want to remove the spent flowers and seed pods that are still attached to the plants.



There have been several windstorms this spring so check plants for limbs that may have gotten broken. Remove them to an adjoining limb just as Jeff Kish recommended at the March meeting.

There is quite a bit of thatch buildup in some warm season lawns. Be sure to dethatch them before there is a lot of new growth. It will help water penetrate the soil and give a better foundation for root development in new growth.

Change Service Requested

## **VEGETABLE GARDENING**

The early spring (or lack of winter) has changed the schedule for most of us who have a vegetable garden in our landscape. The soil may still be cool enough to plant lettuce, spinach, beets and carrots but those who got them in the ground in February may have a larger crop this year.

Soil temperatures are warm enough to plant beans, cantaloupe, corn, cucumbers, squash and even okra from seed. It is probably safe to plant tomato, pepper and herb plants directly in the ground. Remember to rotate the crops so you are not growing plants in the same area of the garden where they were grown the year before. Mulch the plants well to prevent water evaporation and to keep the soil temperature warm in the early growing season. It is safe to



use lawn clippings as mulch in a vegetable garden.

Be sure you put the plants a bit more deeply in the ground than they were growing in the pots. Some gardeners remove the bottom set of leaves and plant to that depth. If you stake tomatoes be sure to put the stake in the ground at the same

time you plant to avoid damage to the roots. The stake or cage will also provide an anchor for the sheet or row cover you will have to put up if we have a cold snap.

For those who applied 10-10-10- or 15-15-15 fertilizer when the garden was planted earlier in the season it will need to be reapplied about every 6 weeks through the growing season — but switch to a 5-10-5 product.

With the early warmth insects have also appeared earlier. Even honey bees have been active most of the winter. Cabbage loopers appeared earlier than usual. The

Bt products are a good “organic” control.

## **HOUSEPLANTS**

Lots of gardeners let their houseplants spend the summer outside. Your editor started taking some of hers out in mid-March. They got sun-burned. Remember

to protect the plants with a bit of shade until they are accustomed to the brighter sunlight. If the plants have outgrown their container they can be repotted.

Newly repotted plants do need more sunlight protection until their root system is established.

