

The Clod-Hopper

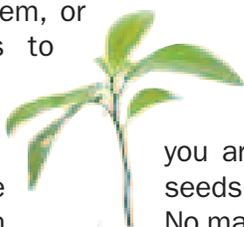


Volume 29 Edition 2 Gardeners of Wake County, Inc. – Raleigh, NC

FEBRUARY 2013

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Do we control the plants in our garden or do they control us? Michel Pollan posed the question in his book *The Botany of Desire*. It has made me think about the plants we love in a different light. I'm no longer sure whether I pick flowers because I like them, or plants produce flowers to become beautiful so I will pick them and spread them around. For many plants, people help more than honeybees. Pollan says we often think that wild plants and animals are smarter than domesticated ones. We may



admire wolves for being more capable than dogs. Now the zinger — there may be 100,000 wolves but more than 1,000,000 dogs. Which animal has been more intelligent in dealing with people and spreading itself?

As each of us decides which seeds to bring to the March Meeting Seed Exchange it is worth contemplating if you are the one who picks which seeds to bring or if the seeds do. No matter the answer, "The Botany of Desire" is an enjoyable read.

— Mark Boone

MEMBERSHIP

For those of you who have not renewed your GWC membership, there is a membership form on page 3 for you to complete and return to Carole Johnson ASAP. If you have already renewed your membership you may give the form to a prospective member. Of the 172 members listed in the 2012 directory, 78 joined prior to 2000 and 22 of

them are designated "L or LL."

If you wondered what the L and LL designations in the directory mean, they recognize "life members" in national and local organizations. The "one-L" members were life members of the local club who paid a lump sum and are entitled to club membership for their lifetime. The "two-L" members are life members of both the local and national organizations. The national organization is now recognized as National Men's Garden Club and Gardeners of America. Our LL members receive a publication from the national organization and are entitled to attend their national meetings.

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CLUB MEETINGS

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

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|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| March 19 | Soil, Skin of the Earth. David Crouse, NCSU |
| April 16 | Best Garden Plants for NC. Pam Beck, Garden Writer |
| May | Picnic – date not available |

February Meeting

This meeting is a good opportunity for you to meet Jeana Myers, Wake County Extension Horticulture Agent. Her topic is "Favorite Foods from the Garden". The emphasis will be on food plants that are fairly easy to grow.

CAMELLIAS

A letter arrived from a camellia growing friend in England over the holidays. The UK had the wettest year ever recorded and some of their plants have disease and root problems. The plants in our area have had almost ideal



(continued on page 3)

FEBRUARY IN THE GARDEN

For years in our area, the trusted source for gardening information has been John Harris, The Tar Heel Gardener. He retired from NCSU in 1969 but continued to practice landscape architecture. Many couples started out married life with the gift of a landscape plan from Mr. Harris. His radio career began in the 1940's when he substituted for members of The Raleigh Garden Club who answered gardening questions for WPTF radio. By 1951 he was with a pre-recorded show that ran for 15 minutes and eventually longer. Listeners mailed in their questions, enclosing disfigured leaves, twigs, insects (dead and alive) or blooms.

In 1982 he published *The Garden Calendar* for North Carolina. Your editor purchased her copy for \$4.95. It is used to produce outlines for *The Clodhopper*. Occasionally a copy will show up at the flea market for re-sale. John has now retired at Springmore and last summer he was still growing beautiful roses. He celebrated a birthday, we think his 98th, in January.

According to The Tar Heel Gardener, February is the time to sow seeds for annuals so they can be set in beds outside when the weather warms. Fertilize bulbs as they emerge from the ground using 8-8-8 at a rate of about 2 pounds per 100 square feet. It is also late enough to force blooms from forsythia, Japanese quince and fruit trees to enjoy inside for a week or so.

Check household ferns for scale insects and wash with a soapy spray or use an insecticide. Apply insecticides outdoors on a warm day. Check azaleas, oleanders and gardenias for cold

damage. Wait until new growth emerges before removing dead stems. If the bark on the stem is loose and the stem is completely girdled you can remove the damaged stem.

To check camellia blooms for cold damage you can pull off a bud and cut it lengthwise with a knife. Cold damaged blooms will have black areas at the base of the bud. If one bud on a plant is damaged there will probably be others. You do not have to pull off cold damaged blooms.

Mr. Harris also says February is a good time to plant strawberries and to start a vegetable garden. He has a planting guide that tells how much to plant per person, the ideal dates for planting and the date to maturity for plantings. He also reminds us that smokers need to be careful handling plants, especially tomatoes. Tobacco mosaic will infect vegetable plants and your hands can transmit it from you cigarette to the plants.

He also reminds us that Valentine day is a good time to fertilize fescue lawns. It is also a good time for husbands to remember their wives with a card or box of candy.

Seed Starting

Most of the gardening magazines are featuring articles on starting seeds in the January and February issues. There are also several books published for hobby growers on the topic. The one on your editor's desk is *The New Seed-Starters Handbook* by Nancy Bubel, first published by Rodale Press in 1988.

To start seeds indoors you need a planting medium, a container and a location that will hold the contain-

ers and provide a light and temperature source to control germination. Vermiculite is a favorite medium for many, but be sure to get the horticultural grade because the one used by building contractors is usually too alkaline and may contain chemicals that are toxic to plant roots.

A mixture of equal parts vermiculite, milled sphagnum moss and perlite also works well. Do not use peat moss because it is too coarse for small seeds. It may also dry out and get crusty which reduces the germination rate. You can also use a "layering system" that starts with a half-inch layer of wet sphagnum moss, then a one-inch layer of a good sterile potting soil and topped with a half inch layer of vermiculite.

Milk cartons can be used as a container. You cut out one side of a quart container or cut a half-gallon container in half lengthwise. Disposable aluminum and plastic trays can also be used. Most garden centers also sell plastic trays and containers that can be re-used.

Many of our vegetable seeds have to be started 8 to 12 weeks before the last frost. Some ornamentals will get started even earlier. You will need to check temperatures for germination of many seeds. If temperatures higher than 74 are required you will need to provide a source of bottom heat, either a heat lamp or a heating cable.

You will also have to provide a light source for the plants when they sprout. If they are close to a window the seedlings will grow toward the light so they must be turned frequently to keep them upright.



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name _____

Spouse _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone (h) _____ (w) _____

E-mail _____

Occupation _____

Gardening Special Interests _____

Other Hobbies _____

Membership dues are \$15 for individuals and \$25 for families for the calendar year January to December. Make checks payable to Gardeners of Wake County. Application form and check are to be mailed to:

Gardeners of Wake County
Carole Johnson, Membership Chairman
5346 Lake Wendell Rd.
Zebulon, NC 27597

Camellias *(continued on page 1)*

water and temperature conditions so we will have to find other explanations for the disease problems that occur.

Our camellias have bloomed their heads off and several put on new growth in November. That growth may not harden off before hard freezing occurs. We will probably have to wait until March to see how much damage occurs. Don't worry about picking up the fallen petals from *C. sasanqua* but do pick up the blooms from *C. japonica*. Also, pull out any blooms that drop and get caught in the limbs of the plants. Some diseases, especially petal blight, are spread by infected blooms. If you had severe problems with insects or diseases on plants last year this is a good time to spray the plants, especially

the back of the foliage, with dormant oil spray.

Some sasanquas put on new growth, set buds then grew and set more buds. They bloomed twice. Those plants need to be cut back severely before spring growth starts. Many of the japonicas that usually bloom in February and March have already bloomed and their growth buds started swelling in January. Many of the plants had a very heavy growth-bud set. Look at the tips of stems on most camellias and you will see two types of buds. One type is fat and has a rounded tip; those are bloom buds. Growth buds are slender and



more sharply pointed. You can reduce the new growth on a camellia by twisting a few growth buds off. Remember that buds growing off the top of a stem will produce growth growing up while downward facing buds will direct more downward facing growth.

Watch to see what happens after our late January freezing temperatures. Plants growing under trees and protected from cold winds are usually safe but blooms may be damaged. That may affect participation in area Camellia shows. The Triangle Camellia Society Camellia Show is scheduled for March 9 at the JCRA and you are encouraged to enter blooms. They start accepting blooms at 8:00am and try to close entries around 10.

GARDENERS OF WAKE COUNTY

5346 Lake Wendell Road
Zebulon, NC 27597

Change Service Requested

WEEDS

Wayne Carlson, Master Gardner and recently retired scientist from Bayer Crop Science provided information to identify and control weeds in our landscape. Many of us think of weeds as pests and plants that will not stay in their proper place. In the scheme of nature they probably serve useful functions and they are certainly adaptable plants that appear to travel and grow anywhere.

They are great at reproduction. Some weeds produce more than 100,000 seeds a plant. Some will “drop body parts” that grow to produce new



plants. Some develop covers or “attaching devices” that will attach to the fur of animals so seeds will be carried further from their native spot. Others develop tiny “parachutes” that allow them to be carried miles by air. Some seeds remain dormant for many years until conditions favorable to their sprouting occur. You can pull Bermuda grass, cut off the roots, let them dry out then replant the root a year or more later to generate another plant.

There are benefits from some weeds. Their leaves and shoots are food for humans and animals. After forests or prairies burn, weed

seeds germinate to allow plants to develop and prevent erosion. Some plants are used for dyes. Many provide food for birds and wildlife. *Anthemis catula* (Chamomile, Dog Fennel or Mayweed) grows in rich moist soil so it is an indicator of very fertile soil.

There are handbooks and web sites available to help identify weeds. Keys have been developed to make identification easier for professionals and homeowners. Check with some of our newer Master Gardeners to learn more about these techniques.

