

# The Clod-Hopper



Volume 29 Edition 7 Gardeners of Wake County, Inc. – Raleigh, NC

JULY 2013

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Oh, the weeds of summer! For the first month or so after I plant my vegetable garden I am very diligent about making sure every weed is pulled up daily. Then something happens. It could be a few days of rain, a weekend away or just getting busy at work. Suddenly little blades of crabgrass that I could pull up with my thumb and index finger have blossomed into gigantic monsters that require me to rent a tractor with a backhoe to loosen.

Then I think "I'll just spray a little Roundup on the weeds. That will teach them to come up in my garden." Sure, the weeds die but so do the vegetable plants that got the

spray when the wind picked up the minute the spray was in the air. Then I kick myself for being foolish and resolve to never take the lazy way out again.

On Father's Day my second son's girlfriend texted me to say she hoped I had a relaxing day. I texted her back and said: "yes, but in a perverse way. I spent the day pulling weeds." Isn't that how life is? There are always weeds to keep us humble. Dealing with them when they are small is sure a lot easier than when they get out of control.

— Mark Boone,  
President

## JULY PROGRAM

Anne Clapp is on tap as speaker at the July meeting. For 22 years your *Clodhopper* editor has spent Saturday morning answering gardening questions on a show called "The Weekend Gardener". A radio show on gardening has been part of the WPTF (680am) lineup since the 1940's. Ladies from The Raleigh Garden Club were the first

"experts". Each Wednesday they sent two members to the studio in downtown Raleigh to open the letters from listeners, select the ones they could answer in 30 minutes, and record a show that was aired on Saturday morning. If one, or both, of "the ladies" could not come at her selected date she usually called John Harris, an extension specialist in horticulture and member of the NC State College faculty, to substitute. By 1946 John was doing the show by himself.

The format remained the same. Letters were selected, read and answered. When John retired in the mid-80's the station asked Erv

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## CLUB MEETINGS

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

- August 20** Bryce Lane, NCSU  
"Beautiful Bushes:  
Super Shrubs for  
the Landscape"
- Sept. 17** Victor Ahlberg of  
Ahlberg Water  
Gardens.

## NEW MEMBERS

We welcome two new members to the club after our June meeting. Elizabeth Calwell is a flight attendant from Cary who is interested in "every blooming thing". Lynne Peters is a real estate broker from Cary who is interested in shade gardening.

## JULY IN THE GARDEN

After a long, cool, wet spring we seem to be moving into a hot, wet summer. Our rain levels in Wake County have been well above average so there has been a lot of growth on trees, shrubs and lawns. Be careful cutting back excess growth on trees and shrubs. The blooms for flowering and fruiting plants get set on the new wood; if you cut too



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## JULY PROGRAM –

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Evans, Wake County Extension agent and horticulture specialist, to become the Weekend Gardener. The show was “live” for one hour on Saturday morning and eventually listeners called with their questions. Master Gardeners from Erv’s classes filled in for him when he began having throat problems in the early 1990’s.

The three that pulled frequent

duty were Jim Eads, retired botany professor at Meredith College, Pam Beck and Anne Clapp. Eventually Anne became the permanent replacement; the show was extended to 2 hours and is now 3 hours. There are frequent “visiting guests” such as Rufus Edmisten, Pam Beck, Phil Campbell, the “folks from Bartlett Tree”, and “the curator of the grounds at The Governor’s Mansion”. There are “frequent callers” as well; we treasure the ones who have the answer to a

question that has us stumped

On the evening of July 16 we’ll do our own version of “The Wednesday Night Gardener.” It will start with some “remarks from the speaker”, then we will take questions from the floor. You can even bring “bugs and leaves” in a plastic bag, but take them home with you so we don’t add to the problems at the Arboretum. Hopefully there will be someone in the audience who can help answer the questions when the speaker is stumped.

## NOISY CACTUS

Those of you who are not members of the Men’s Garden Club of America may have missed the recent news story entitled “Never Buy a Noisy Cactus.” A San Diego gardener bought a very large cactus for her new home and was pleased to get it for the “installed price” of \$3,000. A few days after the installation, the cactus seemed to be swaying and humming. Not knowing where to turn, she called 911 and fortunately for her talked to an operator who knew what this strange behavior was. She was told to get out of the house immediately and stay in her car until an emergency team arrived.



The emergency team had just enough time to move the plant to

the wasteland behind the house before it burst open and scattered tarantulas in all directions. The nursery refunded the \$3,000 and paid an exterminator to spray the entire block.

## SUMMER FOLIAGE

Green is a cool, restful color in the heat of summer and there are many shades of green from light yellow greens to dark blue greens. They may be combined effectively in the landscape especially with the addition of shrubs and trees with maroon or purple foliage and other variegations with white or cream. The three major public gardens in the Triangle have collections that contain a wide variety of foliage plants. You may want to visit them when it is not comfortable to work in your own garden.

A purple foliage plant that does well in our area is “smokebush”, *Cotinus coggygria*. The blooms that appear in mid-summer are soft panicles that look like a large puff of smoke. The plants are deciduous and can get over 20 feet tall so they need to be sited carefully. The other bit of advice for gardeners in our area is to keep the plants cut back by trimming them to about 4 feet each spring. This is said to improve the color of the plants in our heat. Some popular cultivars in this area are “Royal Purple” and ‘Velvet Cloak’. A new

introduction is ‘Black Velvet’ that has very dark purple foliage which is retained until very late in the fall.

Another purple foliage addition to gardens in our area is “ninebark”, *Physocarpus opulifolius*. It prefers acidic soil and does well in both sun and shade. Diabolo is a cultivar that will get as tall as 9 feet and has purple leaves that will turn red when temperatures are consistently over 90 degrees. Summer Wine is a cultivar that stays smaller (5 to 6 feet) and retains the reddish-purple color to the foliage in the heat.

A variegated deciduous shrub that adds some colorful foliage is a beauty-berry called “Duet”. It has a leaf that has a white edge and a bright green center. The berries are white, not purple.



Some garden writers recommend *Daphne xTransatlantica* ‘Summer Ice’ for its compact size, light green leaves with a white margin and blooms that appear sporadically from spring to fall. If you have grown other *Daphne*’s successfully you may want to try it. Most of the *Daphnes* that have been planted in my yard succumb to “mad *Daphne* disease” within 5 years. They can be ‘finicky’ but it is a ‘colorful evergreen’ in the landscape.

### The Clod-Hopper

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For membership information or to change your address contact Carole Johnson, membership chairman at the address published in the membership directory.

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

## PLANT BREEDING

Thanks to Charles Gilliam for his notes on Dennis Werner's presentation at the June meeting. The emphasis of the talk seemed to be on breeding improved cultivars of some of our popular ornamental plants. Exciting new plants usually get into the nursery trade in one of two ways.

The easier method is to walk through a lot of gardens or plant collections and find one that is a bit different from the others — and different enough that someone will want to buy it. Then you take lots of cuttings and start propagating and selling it. The rooted cuttings will be identical to the parent plant. In most cases the original plant was a “chance seedling” that occurred when an insect transferred pollen, a seed dropped from the “fruit” and a plant grew from the seed. You may get the chance to “name” the plant and sell it but “Mother Nature” did the plant breeding.

As Dr. Werner explained, some plant breeders do use bees for pollinating their crosses but it is done in a controlled environment. A tent is set up to cover the “mother” plant and keep insects out. As the blooms begin to open you move the “father” plant and a hive of bees into the enclosure. After the plants have set fruit the bees are removed. The seeds are collected from either one or both plants when they ripen. Then they are sown at the appropriate time to produce plants for additional study.

The other technique is to do hand pollination in a controlled environment, usually a greenhouse or laboratory. The pollen is collected from the desired plant or plants and brought into the controlled environment where it is transferred to the

seed producing parent.

The seed will be collected when it is ripe then planted out to grow the offspring from the cross. For ornamental shrubs it will take several years to grow the plants to flowering size for further evaluation. When a desirable plant is found it is then propagated for sale. For many years the only method available was growing plants from cuttings taken from the desired plant. Now it is much faster to get marketable plants from tissue culture.

At least two of Dr. Werner's Buddleias are in the market today. “Blue Chip” is probably the most popular; “Miss Ruby” the dark pink cultivar, is named for Sanford, NC resident Ruby McSwaim. “Miss Ruby's” portrait with her fur stole is in the entrance area of the JCRA.



The other plant propagation project he discussed was the development of the Ruby Falls Redbud, *Cercis canadensis* ‘Ruby Falls’. In that project more than 400 seeds were planted from the original cross. Five plants were selected for further study and the most promising was named “Ruby Falls”. It is a “weeping” redbud and one of them is growing at the southeast stairs just beyond the water garden at the entrance to the McSwaim building. The plant is staked and trained until its trunk gets to the height desired, then the plant is allowed to drape and develop a weeping form. The plants need sun to maintain their colorful foliage. Plants growing in too much shade will have a green leaf.

To protect the rights of plant developers and control the sales of the plants, they are patented. Nurseries propagating and selling ‘Ruby Falls’ pay a royalty so NCSU gets \$2 from each plant produced.

## MORE EDIBLE GARDENING

Almost every gardening publication on the newsstand these days has information on growing vegetables. It would be interesting if someone would compare the information available today to the information that was distributed to those who planted Victory Gardens in the early 1940's. The appearance and structure of the gardens and the vegetable cultivars available have changed greatly in 70 years.

One of the gardeners who has written several books on home vegetable gardening in the modern era as well as books on preparing meals from home grown vegetables is Rosalind Creasy. She began gardening in 1968 when she, her husband and two small children moved to California. The title that is most intriguing is “Blue Potatoes, Orange Tomatoes: How to Grow a Rainbow Garden.” It was published by Sierra Press in 1994. “The Complete Book of Edible Landscaping” was published in 2010.

Mrs. Creasy gardens in Los Altos, California just north of San Francisco. One of her complaints about gardening in that area is that the nights are so cool you can't grow Brandywine tomatoes. She does not “row garden”

but incorporates the veggies in the landscape. Herbs, vegetables and ornamentals are grown together, without the use of pesticides. The theory is that the ornamentals attract a lot of the beneficial insects. In time, the aphids that do much of the damage find another place to live. The book she recommends for more information on



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**GARDENERS OF  
WAKE COUNTY**

5346 Lake Wendell Road  
Zebulon, NC 27597

Change Service Requested

**Edible Gardening –**

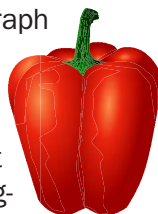
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insect control is “*Re-bugging Your Home and Garden: A Step-by-Step Guide to Modern Pest Control*” written by Ruth Troetschler in 1996.

In developing her own vegetable garden on a piece of land that had been treated with pesticides for years she started by removing all the plants from one section of the property, adding several inches of compost and digging it in. Then she planted ornamentals such as Shasta Daisies, twin-spurs (Diascia) and marigolds. After several years she started adding vegetables. One of the photographs in her first book shows Kale growing in a bed surrounded by a small pink flowering



plant. Another photograph shows pepper and tomato plants surrounded by begonias.



Zinnias are a great companion plant for vegetables. Some new cultivars to try are ‘Uproar Rose’, a large rose colored flower that is very mildew resistant; the low growing Zebra Yellow that gets no taller than 6 to 8 inches; Zahara Starlight Rose that is powdery mildew resistant and forms a compact plant 12 inches tall with a spread of 18 inches.

There are several methods of controlling the aphid population. They are the major food source for several insects so attracting ladybugs, Syrphid flies also known as hoverflies, Aphidid wasps and Lacewings will reduce the aphid population.

**July in the Garden**

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much off you reduce the bloom for next year.

Speaking of fruiting plants, for those who have fig trees it is time to make the second fertilizer application. The fruit has been set and there is plenty of moisture in the soil. (The first set of figs on my trees dropped after a late freeze but new ones have formed.) If your blackberry harvest is over it is time to cut back the canes that have finished fruiting. Next year’s fruit will be produced on the new canes that are developing.



**New Members**





**Elizabeth Calwell,**




**Cary**




**Lynne Peters,**




**Cary**





