

# The Clod-Hopper



Volume 28 Edition 5 Gardeners of Wake County, Inc. – Raleigh, NC

MAY 2012

## APRIL MEETING

The Club is participating in the community garden program again this year as part of our contribution to the “Plant-a-Row for the Hungry” program. Mac Williamson or CJ Dykes would be a good person to contact if you want additional information or would like to volunteer to help this year.

The Projects Chairman position on the Board had not been filled at the time this was written so you may want to contact Charles Gilliam to volunteer. This person chairs the committee that recommends club projects to the Board and selects

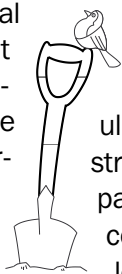
ones of its members as the project leader.

CJ Dykes provided the demonstration at the April meeting. His subject was “Propagating Prickly Pear Cactus”. He recommended sturdy gloves to protect your hands and used a pair of tongs or pliers to hold the cactus pad when it was removed from the plant and when it was placed in the sand/soil potting medium. You can use skewers or small sticks to hold the pad upright in the pot until new roots develop.



## WORM COMPOSTING

Greg Morris shared his enthusiasm for improving our lawns and gardens with compost and compost tea instead of chemical fertilizers. Compost is the result of decaying plant material or animal manure. The product can be used as a top dressing in the garden, dug into beds at the time of planting or you can put it in water to make “compost tea”.



Many gardeners create their garden compost in a backyard compost pile using a combination of “green” and “brown” yard wastes. Adding “junk mail” to the mix is becoming more popular. Tear the paper into smaller strips for quicker composting. The paper products add carbon to the compost. To maintain the oxygen levels needed for the bacteria and other micro-organisms to grow and break down the plant material the pile must be turned on a regular basis. An alternative technique is to use a “vermi-composting” system.

The worms used are not the local earthworms that inhabit our gardens and healthy lawns but Red Wigglers

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## CLUB MEETINGS

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

- May 15** Picnic at 6:00 pm at Mark Boone’s House
- June 19** Tim Alderton “JCRA Through the Seasons”
- July 17** Dick and Judith Tyler of Pine Knott Farms

## AZALEA SALE

Thank you to all those members who helped with the Azalea Sale this year. Saturday morning got off to an interesting start when parking lots were blocked off for the Flea Market and Home Show and the keys for the gates to the Flower Show Grounds” had to be tracked down.

The final earnings report is not available because all the plants were not sold. Phil Campbell has agreed to sell the remaining plants on consignment so if there was a plant you “forgot” to buy in April you can go to Campbell Road Nursery to look at the selections that are still available. It would be a good trip to make anyway because those plants that Phil showed pictures of at the February meeting are now in stock. (The double-flowered Impatiens that looks like a miniature rose really does look like its picture and will brighten up a shady area.)



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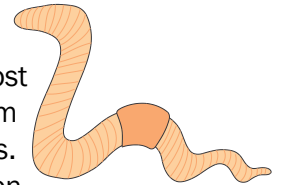
- Activities . . . . . Juliette LaBonte
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**WORM COMPOSTING** (continued from page 1)

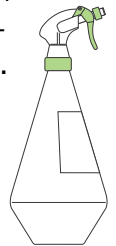
(Eisenia fetida) or European night crawlers (E. hortensis). They may be purchased at a bait shop or try FindWorms.com to locate a worm farm.

The worm-composting system that Greg brought to the meeting was "The Worm Factory". It is a set of 3 stackable trays over a collecting tray base. The bottom tray contains the waste products and the worms. The middle tray has collected waste products. The worms "eat" the material in the bottom tray to produce the compost then climb to the tray above them that is filled with collected materials. The top tray serves as the collection spot for new waste material. The bottom tray can be emptied when the compost is completed and it then becomes the top tray to keep the system in continuous production.



It is also possible to "worm compost" at the garden site. The area is cleaned in the fall and the soil broken up. The organic material is put in place and the special composting worms added to the mix. By spring the area is ready to plant. Remember, our local earthworms are not in the composting business.

To make compost tea you have to put completed compost in a 5 gallon or larger container, add water and allow the material to "brew" for about 24 hours. The liquid is then drained and sprayed on the lawn or garden area. Some people add liquid seaweed or fish emulsion for additional nutrients. Molasses added to the mix is said to increase the number of microbes in the liquid. Fish emulsion does seem to attract cats to gardens where it is used.



Your editor's notes say 5 gallons of compost tea will cover 1 acre of lawn. The first year of use you may have to apply the tea up to 8 times. By the third year most gardeners find a spring and fall application provides enough nutrients to maintain a healthy lawn. The benefits seem to be fewer disease problems, a deeper root system and better water retention in plants.




**New Members**





**Kurt Preston, Raleigh**



**James & Katherine Moore, Cary**



**Curt Renz, Cary**



**Mack Haywood, Cary**













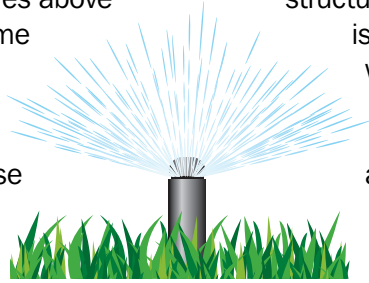


## WATERING

The news that the City of Raleigh was lifting restrictions on the use of irrigation water was good news to a lot of gardeners. The mild winter and early spring have encouraged many plants to bloom earlier than usual. New growth on shrubs and trees developed earlier in the season as well. With temperatures above average in April some plants drooped on hot days and needed watering.

A lot of us with rose gardens have installed drip irrigation systems to keep the water off the foliage. We need to check the system now to make sure it is not leaking and that it delivers the water where it is needed. A good layer of mulch over the bed will reduce evaporation and keep the soil cool.

Some of us are using beds of annuals for color. A soaker hose un-



der the mulch is a good way to provide even watering when things are hot and dry. Another “instant plant interest” is provided with containers. They make spots of color at the mailbox, on the patio or on the driveway next to the garage. Try one of the planter systems with a double pot structure where the outer pot is filled with water and a wicking system moves the water into the soil in the pot above.

Another tip in our area of the world is to avoid working in the garden right after a rain or after you have run the overhead sprinkler. Plant diseases are spread very easily when you and your clippers move from one damp infected plant to a nearby healthy plant. Wait until the plants are dry before you move between them.

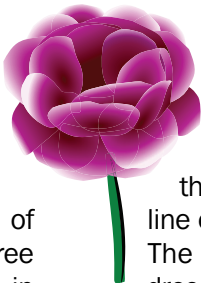
## PEONIES

This seems to have been a good spring for peonies in our area. The plants came out of the ground in February and they are finishing their bloom period in early May. Several of the “walkers” in the neighborhood have walked into the yard to look at the single red cultivar “Scarlett O’Hara”. I found it years ago in a garden center in Ohio on one of Tony Avent’s “One More Block” garden tours. Tony listed it in his 2011 spring catalog.

There are basically 3 types of peonies: the herbaceous, the tree peony that has been cultivated in China for over 1000 years, and the intersectional which is a cross of the tree and herbaceous. The intersectionals are often called “Itoh” to honor the Japanese gardener who made the cross. This later group seems to do quite well in our area and there are several cultivars that are yellow or coral to expand our

color choices from the more traditional red, pink and white. Tony has several at the nursery.

When the blooms are gone be sure to deadhead the plants. Some in my yard set seed before I got them deadheaded but I snipped those off when I was in the garden yesterday. If you have a Woodland Peony (*Paeonia obovata*) let that go to seed because the opening seed pods in the fall are bright red with a line of large, shiny black seeds. The peonies all got top-dressed with some composted manure. The plants in my yard get mulched during arm weather to keep the soil temperature a bit cooler. You can use composted leaves which will act as additional nutrients for the plant as they continue to break down or you can try pine bark or straw that can be removed easily in October.



## MORE COMPOSTING

When the ink formulation of newspapers was changed several years ago gardeners started using them as mulch in gardens. They do suppress weed growth and if used in the paths between rows in a vegetable garden they reduce the weed population. Some gardeners even add a layer of wood chips or bark if they have had trees cut or pruned and are left with a pile of chips. These products will decompose over the gardening season and can be tilled in the ground for the next season. The trick is to keep them in a pathway, not around the plants, because they will use the nitrogen the plants need for growth.

Sometimes there is a problem with unpleasant odors. If a pile is too wet it smells rotten. This often- occurs in rainy summers. To reduce the odor, turn the pile add dry material as you turn. It could also have too many fresh grass clippings that have matted together. Distribute grass clippings in thin layers in the pile. Large vegetables thrown on the pile also produce odors so break or cut the spoiled vegetables from the refrigerator into smaller pieces before adding them to the pile. The same advice goes for the produce you clean out of the garden. Running them through a chipper will hasten the decay process,

If the pile has an ammonia odor there is too much nitrogen in the system. Add some “brown stuff”.

There are some things you should not add to compost piles. Cat or human feces may be more likely to carry diseases or parasites. Meat, bones and grease will attract animals – and they are very slow to decompose. Coal or charcoal ashes from fireplaces or grills contain high amounts of sulfur and iron. Diseased plant material may spread the same disease to next year’s plants. Weeds that have gone to seed will decompose faster than the seeds and the seeds may survive to spread the weeds to next year’s crops.

**GARDENERS OF  
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## MAY GARDENING

**T**here is still time to prune most spring flowering shrubs. Start pruning such plants as azaleas, camellias and mountain laurel as soon as they have dropped their last bloom. Carolina jessamine and Confederate jasmine vines get cut back after they have bloomed. Do not prune butterfly bushes and



but this might be the year you think about changing some of your horticultural practices and start amending the soil to improve

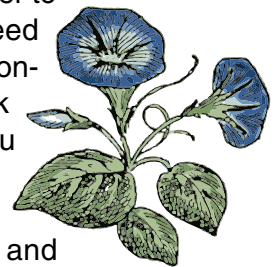
plant growth rather than adding so much fertilizer. Maybe we need to have Tony Avent do another talk on soil improvement.

Scale, aphids, spider mites and lacebugs are showing up in large numbers.



Summer oil is an organic solution for scale. It is a bad year for leaf gall on camellias. The leaves get large and puffy. Eventually they will fall off and they do no damage to the plant. People in some parts of the world eat them as a delicacy. Bugs Barringer who used to write a gardening column in the N&O said recommended you leave town on vacation when the galls appeared. That way you wouldn't worry about them.

Annual vines like Moonflower, Morning Glory and Scarlet Runner Beans can be planted from seed. Remember to break the seed covering of Moonflower and soak them before you put them in the ground,



If daffodils and hyacinths have become crowded and no longer bloom well it is time to dig and divide them. As soon as the foliage turns brown dig the bulbs and divide them. Remove the foliage and soil from the bulbs and then store them in a cool, dark space to set out again in the fall.