

The Clod-Hopper



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SEPTEMBER 2012

HIGHWAY BEAUTIFICATION

For those of you who were not able to be at the August meeting to see Derek Smith's presentation on the North Carolina wildflower highway beautification program, you may want to check out their website <http://www.ncdot.org/wildflower>. The program was a response to Lady Bird Johnson's 1985 national wildflower planting campaign. Governor Jim Martin asked the NCDOT to develop a program in this state. Some of the early planting sites were near rest areas and highway intersections where there were problems with storm water drainage.

The plantings will vary in the 14 geographical divisions of the DOT in the state. Approximately 1,500 acres of plantings are now in place across the state — up from the 12 acres of the first year of the program. Each division receives the same wildflower seeds and daylilies but each division decides which plant combinations to use and how the areas will be designed. About 90% of the seeds are sown in October. The cosmos are sown in July.

The daylily plantings began in the mid 1990's. Plants for the program are grown at the Caledonia State Prison Farm. About 250,000 plants

are produced each year. The plants are large-flowered tetraploids (that can be seen by cars going through the area at highway speeds) that do not have to be divided. They do not grow as quickly as the diploids but they require less maintenance. The plants are fertilized in February. The deer eat the buds as soon as they are formed so some wildlife management is needed at some of the planting sites.



The early-blooming cultivars in the program are Erin Prairie (yellow), George Caleb Bingham (rose pink), Gertrude Condon (golden orange), Leebea Orange, Mary Todd (yellow) and Mauna Loa (orange). Mid to late season bloomers are Buttered Popcorn (yellow), Hyperion (lemon yellow), Joan Senior (white), and Orange Vols (orange). Bloom sizes range from 5 to 7.5 inches.

A third type of roadside planting is receiving quite a bit of attention in Pittsboro this year. They are planting large blocks of Canola along the highways as part of a "bio-fuel" program. The bright yellow flowers are stunning — even at high speeds — and the blooms are easily harvested. It takes 1 year to go from seeding to biofuel!

The funds for the wildflower programs come from the sale of personalized license plates. If you are not already participating in the program you might think about it when it is time to renew your license plate.

SEPTEMBER MEETING

Anne Clapp is scheduled to speak about camellias. Several of the plants in her yard are now over 40 years old. Several of the *C. sasanquas* are already blooming and at least two of the *C. japonicas* are showing color. There will probably be some slides of blooms to convince you how "pretty" they are and there will be some points about their care and feeding. Over 20 years ago the Triangle Camellia Society was formed at a meeting held at the Wake County Office Park. Several of our "Men's Garden Club" members were part of that group.



CLUB MEETINGS

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

- Sept. 18** Camellia Selection and Planting,
Anne Clapp
- Oct. 16** Christmas Trees,
John Frampton,
NCSU School of Natural Resources
- Nov. 20** Duke Gardens,
Jan Little, Director
of Education

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GARDENING SURVEY

Every year the National Gardening Association conducts a survey of American gardeners to see if there are changes in gardening practices. The results of this year's survey are available at the website www.gardenresearch.com.

The good news is that sales of garden products have increased after two years of declining sales. Households in the United States spent about \$29.1 billion on lawns and gardens in 2011. This gardener spent more than the "average families" \$351 and I think many of our club members can say the same. More households are doing their own lawn care than did in the previous year. Do-it-yourself lawn care seems to be increasing at about 3% a year. Local garden centers get about 17% of the business while "home improvement and big box stores" have about 51%. I thought it was interesting that gardeners 34 and under were about 20% more likely to shop at local garden centers than the "older" gardening population.

VEGETABLE GARDENING

On the 3rd Saturday in August the market report from the State Farmers Market announced that the "State Fair" cultivar of peaches showed up at the market that morning. They usually arrive in late September or early October and are the last of the eastern North Carolina peaches. Local apples were also in good supply but many of the "mountain" apples had been killed by a late frost. We had a couple of weeks of very hot weather but we did not have the drought problems that plagued much of the country. Home vegetable gardens seem to have thrived although several of us have lost our crops to the local deer, rabbit and squirrel population.

There is still time to plant and harvest beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, kale, leaf lettuce, mustard greens, onions, radish, spinach and turnips. You'll have to find plants for the broccoli, cabbage and onions, but they are available in several garden centers in this area. The others will produce a good crop from seed if they are planted in early September — or if we have a very mild fall. Remember to add organic matter to the soil and apply 15-15-15 fertilizer at a rate of about one pound per 10-foot row.

The root crops will be more productive planted in a raised bed. The leafy greens can be planted in any part of the garden. Some adventurous gardeners are even planting them in window boxes or other containers on a porch or deck. Container planting may also reduce the damage from the animal population. There isn't a hunting season in the city so we may have to put the window boxes on the upstairs windows.

If you are not planting a fall garden you may want to get cover crops sowed in your garden plots. The leguminous crops such as Crimson Clover and cowpeas will add nitrogen to the soil because they have nitrogen fixing bacteria on their roots. They are the preferred cover crops in this area for that reason. Ryegrass and buckwheat will prevent soil erosion and can be tilled-in when the garden is replanted in the spring. They will provide organic matter, but not nitrogen. All cover crops need to be tilled under before they go to seed because you don't want to pull them as weeds next summer.



FALL CHORES IN THE GARDEN

Iris. It is not too late to divide irises in our area. They seem to need division about every 3 or 4 years in our area. If yours did not bloom this spring it is usually a sign they need to be divided and replanted. German Bearded Iris can be dug, divided and replanted until the first of October. If you notice soft spots on the rhizomes, use a sharp knife to cut out the diseased area and dip the rhizome in a chlorine bleach solution. Mix the solution of half chlorine bleach and half water in a plastic container. Dip and “swish” the rhizome in the solution then allow it to dry off before replanting.



Japanese and Siberian (beardless) iris may be safely divided through the middle of October. The

beardless irises recover from transplanting shock more easily when temperatures are a bit cooler. Both types will need to be watered lightly every other day for about a week and a half after transplanting if we do not have rain.

Roses. Many roses seem to have more vibrant colors in the fall than they do earlier in the year. The bushes may not have as many flowers as they did in May but the individual blooms may actually be larger — and there do not seem to be as many disease problems. Your editor times the application of the Bayer “All-in-one” Rose Care granules so the last application goes around the plant just after Labor Day. If you do not want to apply insect or disease control, apply



fertilizer to encourage new growth and flowers.

Remember how beautiful the displays of rose blooms are at the NC State Fair Flower Show in October. Encourage the formation of buds with good care of the plants then cut the blooms correctly. Take a bucket of fresh water to the garden so you can immerse the stems immediately after they are cut. Make the cut, using sharp clippers, at a slant just above a 5-leaf leaflet. Place the cut stem in the water bucket. The stem will need to be recut under water to encourage the stem to absorb more water.

Peonies. September is usually a good month to plant peonies in this area. Most gardens will need an

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GROWING ASPARAGUS

After 30 years the asparagus bed at your editor’s garden has got to be replaced. It is no longer producing enough spears to justify the space it consumes. The few remaining plants are being dug up this week and getting put in the yard waste recycling bin. They won’t get put on the compost pile because there is always the possibility that they have some “ailment” that could get carried to new plants.

The new growing area will be near the old bed so soil preparation is going to be important. All the old asparagus roots will get removed. The perennial herbs and flowers in the area where the asparagus will get planted next spring are being dug and potted up for temporary storage in a holding bed. Hopefully they will get replanted this fall.

The whole bed will get tilled, or

dug, to a depth of 15 inches as it was 30 years ago. Compost and “well-rotted manure” (not from the sheep farm, this time) will get added to the mix. The weed crop from the first manure lasted for more than 5 years. The soil pH should be close to neutral. Since it is a bit acidic now it will have to be limed. As soon as the soil is prepared the herbs and flowers will get replanted and the “asparagus area” will get seeded with cowpeas as a cover crop.



You can start asparagus from seed but this will be started from plants (crowns). There are a couple of local independent nurseries and farm-supply stores that carry them or they can be purchased from mail-order nurseries. There is a series of hybrids that are mostly

male plants that came out of a Rutgers University research project. There is also a ‘Purple Passion’ cultivar that will produce more female plants. We had a purple cultivar that had a very sweet flavor and the red berries were an attractive fall addition to the garden. “Apollo” is a male variety that is supposed to produce well in warmer climates.

The plants are going to be spaced about 15 inches apart. The closer the plants are together, the smaller the diameter of the spear. Plants 10 inches apart produce pencil thin spears that I think are a bit “tougher” than fatter spears. The ideal spacing would be 20 to 24 inches apart but I don’t have that much space. I’ll measure the space to see how many plants will fit in the area and get them ordered this fall.

**GARDENERS OF
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FALL CHORES IN THE GARDEN

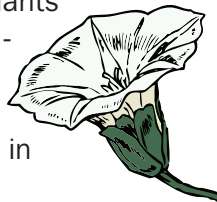
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application of lime before peonies are planted. Container-grown plants are available in local nurseries or plants can be dug and transplanted. New growth buds have already formed; usually they are pink. Those growth buds should remain above the soil line when the plants are in the ground. A very light layer of mulch will keep the soil moist, weeds under control and keep the soil cool in our warm autumn temperatures. Do not mulch heavily for protection from winter cold; peonies actually prefer cooler soil temperatures.



Seeds. Many of our flowering annuals and perennials have set

seed. Keeping spent blooms removed from flowering plants encourages development of more flowers later in the season. If you want to save seed for a seed-exchange or to grow the plants for yourself next year, remove the seed and dry it before you put it in an envelope to store for planting next year. Remember — the definition of a weed is any plant growing out of place. If you don't want to spread your flowering plants keep them dead-headed. (I probably don't want my neighbor's plants in my yard either.)



Dahlias. The summer heat in our area makes it harder to grow "exhibition quality" dahlias. They have more luck in the Midwest and

Northeast. We can leave the plants in the ground over the winter so they don't have to be dug and stored after they bloom in the fall.

There is a hybridizer in North Carolina, Hilltop Gardens, although they are in Cashiers. Brent and Becky's Bulbs in Gloucester, Virginia also have several in their catalog. The Dahlia Society of Georgia has a website www.dahliasocietyofgeorgia.com that has some good information on sources of plants and tips for growing and exhibiting blooms. For those who want to try their luck at growing some for the NC State Fair next year you might look there for some information.

