

# Gardening News

February/March 2020



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## Attracting Song Birds to your Backyard

In case you missed the news, over 3 billion birds have vanished since 1970. There are a variety of factors, but one of them is urban development that has spread across our country. We now have over 40 million acres of turfgrass, often at homes, schools and businesses. The lawn has replaced the natural environment and become an important part of the landscape.

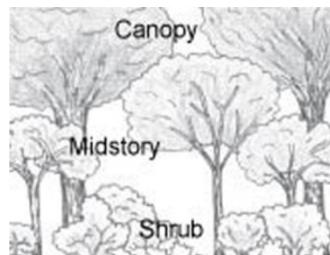
You can help bring back songbirds by following these steps. Remember lawns are a beautiful and integral part of our urban environment. Decreasing the amount of lawn in your home landscape not only helps songbirds, but other native small animals, such as rabbits. Creating landscaped islands or a perimeter of landscaped beds along the edge of your property are examples of ways to increase the plant diversity at your home. Not only can this improve the appearance of your home and its value, it can help songbirds at the same time.

### Plan, Plan, Plan

Before you start planting any landscape plants, be sure to make a plan. Plan where you want the plants and what you want to plant. Even consider why you want to plant it. For example, do you want a shade tree? If so, determine where the south side of your home is for maximum shade benefit. If you have room, then determine which kind of tree you would like. Include an area for the leaves to fall, as they say, 'Leave the leaves.' Planning will help you have a beautifully landscaped home and increase diversity of plant material.

### Short and Tall Plants

Plant low-growing perennials and shrubs under taller shrubs and trees. This helps provide the vegetation layering important to birds. Remember that different birds eat and nest on the ground or in the shrub, mid-story or canopy layers of your landscape.



Vertical structure provides the layering important to birds.

### Year-round Wild Foods

Include a diversity of native plants to provide many of the foods that song birds need:

- **Fruiting Plants.** Include early- and late-fruited plant species. Be sure to remember that only the female of some species produces fruit. Examples include American Holly, wax myrtle and eastern redcedar. In this case, make sure that male plants are present or nearby for pollination.
- **Winter Seed.** Include plants, especially native grasses and perennial wildflowers, which provide seeds for birds in the fall and winter. Leave seed heads at the end of the growing season to provide additional source of winter food for birds. If you can leave an area fallow, or to grow on its own, this will produce abundant seed-

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producing plants. Be sure to mow or till at least every three years.

- **Bird Feeders to Supplement Wild Foods.** Place feeders within 10 to 15 feet of shrubby vegetation, especially evergreen plants. Remember that cats are a predator of song birds, so keep this in mind when placing your feeders. Keep feeders between 3 and 30 feet from windows. Research has shown this will reduce window strikes by birds. Clean your feeders every 2 to 3 weeks to prevent disease transmission. Audubon Society and Cornell Lab of Ornithology have research-based information on types of feeders, bird feed for specific birds and native plants for your home landscape.
- **Birdbath or Water Garden.** Bird baths can add to the interest in your garden. Bird baths should be 2 to 3 inches deep and made of a rough surface to ensure good footing. Birds like to perch so make sure there is a lip and the bird bath is 2 to 3 feet in diameter. Keep clean and full of fresh water. Birds do like running water so a solar water wiggler or other method can be used.
- **Nest Sites.** Most birds nest in the foliage of native plants, but standing dead trees are important nesting sites for many birds. Because dead trees are considered unsightly or a liability risk, nest boxes are frequently used in place of natural cavities. Visit <https://projects.ncsu.edu/goingnative/howto/design/wildneed/nestboxtable.pdf> to find the size of nest box for specific birds. Build a nest box from sturdy lumber like pine, cedar or cypress. Do not include a perch. The nest box should have ventilation, drainage and be able to be cleaned each February, before nesting season begins.
- **Winter Cover.** Dense vegetation provides birds with places to escape from harsh winter weather and predators, such as hawks and house cats. It is important to provide evergreen trees and shrubs, including American holly, wax myrtle and eastern redcedar in your backyard habitat. Sparrows and juncos are especially attracted to loosely stacked dead or pruned limbs and other debris. Brush piles, both small and large, are hotspots for bird activity.

For more information on landscaping for birds visit these NC State Extension Publications and Resources:  
Managing Backyards and Other Urban Habitats for Birds  
[https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/show\\_ep3\\_pdf/1577818643/20197/](https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/show_ep3_pdf/1577818643/20197/)  
Songbirds (and Woodpeckers)  
<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/songbirds>  
Building Songbird Boxes  
<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/building-songbird-boxes>  
Going Native: Urban Landscaping for Wildlife with Native Plants  
[www.projects.ncsu.edu/goingnative](http://www.projects.ncsu.edu/goingnative)  
Going Native: Attracting Songbirds:  
(much of this article is attributed to this link.)  
<https://projects.ncsu.edu/goingnative/howto/design/wildneed/songbird.html>



Birds.cornell.edu

## Repotting House Plants

Repotting (or transplanting) is the transfer of a plant from one container to another. Transplanting is necessary to increase the root system's growing space, to replenish nutrients, improve aeration, and alleviate fertilizer salt buildup. Plants that are healthy and grown under optimal conditions should be repotted annually using fresh potting mix. Repotting is best done in the early spring, before plants start actively growing. There are, however, various signs that repotting may be necessary at other times throughout the year.

- **Stunting:** Plants that are not growing during their active growth period may be outgrowing their pots. If the root system is constricted, roots do not have room to expand. An overabundance of roots quickly uses up the available water and nutrients in the potting mix.
- **Wilting:** When the leaves of a potted plant wilt frequently, yet rehydrate after watering, the roots are not getting enough water, often because the plant is in too small a pot. "Up-potting" the plant increases the amount of water available to the root system. If a plant's leaves remain wilted after watering, most likely the roots are rotted. The continuous wilting means the roots are unable to absorb water. Reduce the amount of water given to the plant or "down-pot" (or do both) to balance the root size and potting mix volume ratio.
- **Escaping:** Plants that have roots pushing out of their pots should be repotted in a larger container.
- **Surface exposure:** When a plant's crown or roots become exposed on the potting mix surface, it could indicate that the media has settled or been washed over to one side of the pot. In this case repotting may not be necessary. Top-dressing, applying additional potting mix to the media surface, may be all that is needed.

## Repotting Techniques

Start repotting by removing the plant from its old pot. While securing the plant with one hand, turn the pot upside-down and gently tap the rim of the container on the edge of a table. If the plant does not slide out easily, its roots might be attached to the inside walls of the container. To detach, carefully run a straight knife between the root ball and container walls. Examine the root ball. A dense root ball is an indication that the plant needs to be potted up into a larger pot. Roots that are so intertwined they retain the shape of the old pot do not develop properly and hinder plant growth if left entangled. Break this encircling growth pattern by teasing the roots apart or by cutting the roots vertically along the side of the root ball.

The container selected for potting-up should be one size larger in diameter than the pot in which the plant is currently growing. For vigorously growing species, two pot sizes larger may be required. If down-potting is necessary, the container size should accommodate the size of the root system. At this stage it is crucial not to overwater nor let the few remaining roots dry out.

Whether potting or repotting, it is always important to use pots that are void of diseases, insects, weed seeds, or build-up of salts from fertilizers. Wash previously used pots in a solution of non-bleach household disinfectant. Rinse the solution off thoroughly prior to use. Scrub clay pots with water and a wire brush to remove salts.



extension.uga.edu

## Reusing Container Media

Container media can be reused as long as no soil-borne disease problems have occurred, such as *Verticillium* or *Fusarium* wilt, in the previous season. If disease was present, the media needs to be discarded or added to an area in the yard or garden that has resistant plants—such as grasses, lilies, or ferns. When reusing container media from year to year, organic matter breaks down and decomposes, causing a decrease in the size of particles and pore space, resulting in reduced drainage and aeration. Emptying out the container mix, breaking up the material and any old roots, and re-blending keep the media from getting too compacted. Because many of the nutrients are used by plants or leached out during the previous growing season, add additional media, compost, and fertilizer.

Article is from NCSU Extension Gardener Handbook. Mays, D., K. Richter, L.K. Bradley, J. Sherk, M. Kistler, and J. Neal. 2018. Plants Grown in Containers, Chapter 18. In: Moore, K.A., and L.K. Bradley (eds). North Carolina Extension Gardener Handbook. NC State Extension, Raleigh, NC. <<http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/18-plants-grown-in-containers>>

## February Gardening Chores

**Overgrown Shrubs:** Late February is the time to prune over grown shrubs. You can severely cut back Chinese and Japanese hollies 18 to 24 inches above the ground. Thin the remaining branches to make room for the new growth and remove any dead wood. Be prepared to regularly prune these plants this year. They will have very vigorous sprouts that will need to be tipped often to encourage branching. If the overgrown plant would fit into your landscape as a small tree, begin converting from a shrub to a tree by removing the bottom 1/3 of the branches.

**Ornamental Grasses:** Cut back ornamental grasses in February before new growth begins. Do not burn grasses.

**Vegetable Gardens:** Plant many cool-season vegetables in the garden in late February. For more information on specific vegetables and herb planting dates visit: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/central-north-carolina-planting-calendar-for-annual-vegetables-fruits-and-herbs>

**Fruit Trees:** Apply dormant oil to fruit trees to manage scale, mites, and other insects. Only apply if these pests are present. Also, prune fruit trees according to the following NCSU Extension Publication: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/training-and-pruning-fruit-trees-in-north-carolina>

**Centipede:** Apply broadleaf herbicides as necessary to control chickweed and henbit. Centipede is sensitive to certain herbicides (like 2,4-D) so choose ones specifically labeled for centipede grass. Read and follow label directions.

## March Gardening Chores

**Keep Pruning:** Continue to prune fruit trees, landscape trees, and shrubs. Remove dead or broken branches, crossing branches that rub another branch. Also remove dead and diseased wood. Plants that bloom in the spring should be pruned right after they bloom. Examples of spring blooming plants are azaleas and forsythia.

**Vegetable Garden Planting:** Follow the guidelines in the flyer 'Central North Carolina Planting Calendar for Annual Vegetables. This is an excellent guide, prepared by NC State for planting vegetable seeds and transplants. <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/central-north-carolina-planting-calendar-for-annual-vegetables-fruits-and-herbs> Plant spring vegetable transplants of cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, potatoes and onions. Plant seeds for lettuce, carrots, beets, spinach, radishes and peas. Other vegetable and herb information can be found in the calendar referenced above.

**Last Frost Date:** Remember our median last frost date is April 2<sup>nd</sup>. The National Weather Service collects data and presents a summary each year. The 2<sup>nd</sup> of April is based on data from 1981 to 2010. BUT, you are most likely to be sure you will not get frost from April 16<sup>th</sup> through October 17<sup>th</sup> each year. With our changing climate, keep an eye on extended forecasts and don't plant too early.

**Ornamentals:** Divide perennials such as hosta's, daylilies, sedums, salvias, mints, thyme and ornamental grasses. This is an easy way to enlarge your garden without purchasing more plants.

## Know and Grow....

### Common Camellia (*Camellia japonica*)

Camellias are a popular evergreen shrub that can grow into the size of a small tree. There are two types of Camellias, Sasanqua and Japanese. Japanese Camellia is often referred to simply as Camellia. Sasanqua camellias (*Camellia sasanqua*) bloom in the fall, from October into December. Camellias (*Camellia japonica*) on the other hand, bloom in late winter into spring. In North Carolina, you can generally expect blooms from February into April.

#### Flower color:

Wow, what a choice! Flowers range from pure white to all shades of pink and red. Some flowers are variegated with white, red and pink all on the same flower. Flowers can be single, semi-double or double, with a bloom size of 2 to 5 inches across. Winter blooming plants are important for pollinators. If selecting to add color and support pollinators, select plants that have single bloom flowers. These flowers will have pollen, where double and semi-double often are sterile or lack substantial pollen.



'Magic City' [CC BY-SA 2.5](#)



'Grace Albritton' [CC BY-SA 2.5](#)



'Morning Glow' [CC BY-SA 2.5](#)

#### Considerations before planting Camellias:

You should take several items into account before planting. Camellias are a broadleaf evergreen shrub, growing from 10 to 13 feet tall. Their spread is 5 to 10 feet wide. So be sure to allocate enough room for this plant in your landscape. Camellias are not fragrant, but their beautiful flowers and dark green foliage make up for the lack of scent. Look for a site that has good drainage, high organic matter, and part shade. Flower color is important but be sure to take these items into consideration as you select a camellia for your landscape.

#### Planting Site:

Good drainage is important when considering where to plant your camellias. They appreciate a site that is damp not wet. If there is standing water after a rain, it may be too wet for camellias.

Camellias are acid loving plants. That means if the pH is 7 or above the plants will not do well. A high pH can limit the plants ability to take up some nutrients, especially iron. You can have what appears to be an iron deficiency, but it is caused by too high a pH. Be sure to take a soil sample prior to planting. If the pH is high add either aluminum sulfate or sulfur. Aluminum sulfate will change the pH as soon as it dissolves in the soil. Sulfur takes several months to lower the pH, due to needing proper amount of water, soil temperature and other factors. If you apply either of these products, be sure to work them into the soil after applying. Soil sample results should indicate the amount of either of the products needed to lower the soil pH.

Camellias require part shade to part sun for the best looking and blooming plant. For the best success with Camellias, choose a site that has four to six hours of morning sun and shade the rest of the day or dappled shade all day. If camellias are planted in full sun, they may have a yellowish look and flowers may not open properly.

### Planting:

As with all shallow rooted plants, plant so the top of the root ball is at or slightly above the original soil level. Dig the hole twice as wide as the size of the pot or container. If roots are wrapped around the root ball, cut off the bottom roots and remove the wrapped roots. If root wrapping is not addressed, over time the plant will slowly decline. Mulch the plants with 2 to 3 inches of mulch.

### General Care:

Camellias can benefit from a fertilization when new growth appears in the spring. Apply an acid loving fertilizer as outlined by the manufacturers label directions. Remember more fertilizer is not better! Another option is to take a soil sample every two years and apply fertilizer according to the test results.



aces.edu

During hot summer dry spells, keep camellias moist, especially during the first few years of growth.

### Insect Pests:

Tea scale is the primary pest of camellias and sasanquas. The scales can be found primarily on the bottom of leaves. Look for white to brown fuzzy masses and if severe enough, yellow blotches on the top of the leaves. To control, apply horticultural oil as directed on the label of the product you are using. Spray both top and bottom leaves until spray runs off the plant. Make sure that spray is only applied at temperatures greater than 45 degrees and no rain is forecasted for 24 hours. You may need to reapply. If leaves fall off, rake them up and dispose them.

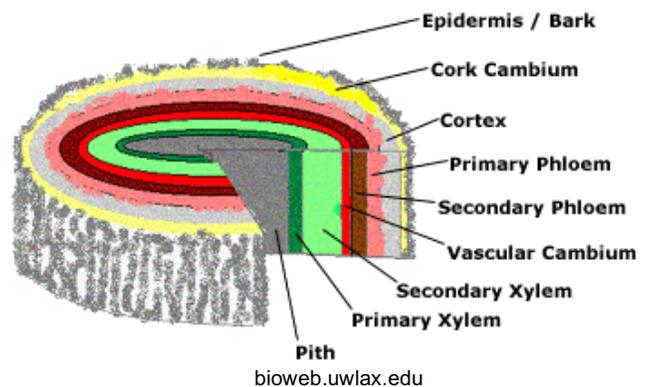
For more information on Camellias visit NC State Extension's Plant Tool Box [www.plants.ces.ncsu.edu](http://www.plants.ces.ncsu.edu) or Clemson's Home and Garden Information Center at <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/camellia/>

## ABC....XYZ Gardening Vernacular

### X is for Xylem

**Xylem** is the principal water carrying tissue of vascular plants. Xylem conducts water and dissolved nutrients upwards from the roots to the leaves. **Wood** is the common name of secondary **xylem**. The accumulation of **wood**, then, results from the continued divisions by the ring of vascular cambium cells just inside the bark.

Simply put, xylem carries water and nutrients upward in the tree. Old xylem becomes wood, making the rings we count to find out the age of the tree.



bioweb.uwlax.edu

## Gardeners, It's Time to Start Your Seeds

It's that time of year when the seed catalogs start arriving in the mail. The glossy photos of veggies and flowers spill from the pages while you glance out the window at gray skies and bare branches. But to make the transition from drab beds to

beautiful vegetables and flowers requires one of three things: Either buy plants from your local garden center, buy seed packets there, or place your orders from one or more of the catalogs (or their online shopping sites).

Starting plants from seeds has several advantages:

1. You get exactly the variety you want, which may not be available at the store.
2. You get a head start on your gardening calendar so that your seedlings will be ready to transplant and grow outside at the proper time.\*
3. You control the growing conditions that your seeds will require to germinate, develop into healthy seedlings and be ready for transplanting. Regrettably, some garden center plants come home with diseases and pests.

However, there are some challenges that confront the gardener:

1. Seeds have different conditions that must be met if seeds are going to sprout and grow. It is imperative that you follow closely the seed packet instructions.
2. Some calculations are required to assure that the seeds are planted at the right time to then be transplanted later into the garden plot.\*
3. You must be vigilant in checking often to see that the seeds and then seedlings are doing okay: Make sure the soil stays moist, not wet and that the pots have good air circulation, proper temperatures and plenty of light.
4. Unlike established outdoor plants, seedlings are tender and must be gradually introduced into full sun, wind and perhaps chilly air. This is called "hardening off." Offer them increasing exposure to these elements each day over a period of a week.
5. You must make every effort to see that your young seedlings do not succumb to "damping off." This dreaded disease is actually a collection of fungal diseases that attack young seedlings with deadly results. Tender stems brown and wither and tops topple over.

There is no cure, but you can take some steps to reduce the likelihood that this will happen.

- Use sterile potting soil. Do not use garden soil!
- Avoid over-watering especially when done on the soil surface.
- Provide good air circulation.
- Sprinkle dry soil and/or cinnamon on the surface next to the seedling stems to further protect against damping off.

To start your seeds, you will need:

- Sterile potting soil
- Small pots or trays with dividers
- A dibble or small straight stick to poke holes in the soil for your seeds to lodge in
- A watering can or source for adding chemical-free water to the tray bottom
- Plant markers



Optional items include: a warming pad or tray to maintain a warm germination environment, and a grow light if starting in a low-light area.

NOTE: Seedlings do not need fertilizing until they have grown into young plants with their first true leaves. Seedlings are delicate and should be handled by gently grasping their tops, not their stems, when transplanting.

So, happy seed growing. You'll thrill watching your babies grow and later start producing for you!

-Larry Schulz  
Extension Master Gardener

\* Visit this link, [https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/show\\_ep3\\_pdf/1580493117/23265/](https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/show_ep3_pdf/1580493117/23265/) for "Central North Carolina Planting Calendar for Annual Vegetables, Fruits, and Herbs." Or you can pick one up at NC Cooperative Extension, Scotland County Center 231 E. Cronly St., Suite 800 Laurinburg, NC 28352 910-277-2422.

## American Crow

### *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

Crows are thought to be among our most intelligent birds, and the success of the American Crow in adapting to civilization would seem to confirm this. Despite past attempts to exterminate them, crows are more common than ever in farmlands, towns, and even cities, and their distinctive caw! is a familiar sound over much of the continent. Sociable, especially when

not nesting, crows may gather in communal roosts on winter nights, sometimes with thousands or even tens of thousands roosting in one grove.



Birds.cornell.edu

Known for its 'caw caw' sound, crows are one of the most recognizable birds. Large all-black birds are commonly seen in habitats from opens woods, treetops, empty beaches and even around towns. They eat almost anything, earthworms, insects, other small animals' seeds and fruit. Crows have been known to eat garbage, so be careful in disposing of your trash.

According to 'Science Friday' American crows recognize faces, and have been seen gathering around dead crows in so-called 'funerals.' American crows are interesting and intelligent birds, to learn more about them, visit Audubon.org and allaboutbirds.org

## Insects You Want in your Home Landscape

Most insects in your home landscape don't harm plants or people. These insects we want are called beneficial insects. They benefit the garden by improving our soil, pollinating plants and eating the insects that actually do harm our plants.

### Identify before you spray:

Before spraying to minimize insects, be sure to know what you are spraying for and if there are already beneficial insects in place eating those detrimental insects. Insects have life stages in their life cycle. The early life stage can look very different from the mature insect. By encouraging beneficial insects, you can minimize your need to spray.

Some beneficial insects you want in your home garden include: parasitic wasps, lady beetles, ground beetle, tachinid fly, syrphid fly, green lacewing, soldier beetle, bees, spiders and dragon fly. Let's explore 3 of these in this article.

**Parasitic wasps** control pests by laying eggs on or in the bodies of pests, and as the eggs hatch they feed on the pest, slowly killing it. One example of this is the Braconid wasp that lays its eggs in a tomato hornworm. Once the larvae hatch inside the hornworm, they will later emerge as adults. Parasitic wasps also lay eggs in aphids. Be sure to realize that the adult parasitic wasp is a beneficial insect. The long "tail" is to lay the eggs in the caterpillar or aphid.



UM Extension



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**Ground beetles** will feed on slugs, and they also will eat weed seeds. They consume many soil dwelling insect pests. If you are spraying or broadcasting insecticides for fire ants or other detrimental insects, be sure to check the label. Some insecticides for fire ants may kill many other insects.

**Lady beetles** are predators of aphids, whiteflies, scales, and other insects. There are many different species of lady beetles. They will feed on common pests such as aphids, mealybugs, whiteflies, and even scale insects.



Lady beetle larvae feeding on aphids, photo by Winston Beck

For more information on beneficial insects:

- Contact the Horticulture Agent at the office of NC Cooperative Extension. In Scotland County call 910-277-2422 or Hoke County 910-875-3461.
- University of Georgia Pictures of insects: [insectimages.org](http://insectimages.org)
- Iowa State University Bug Guide: [bugguide.net](http://bugguide.net)



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## Community Gardening Calendar

### CLASSES ARE OPEN TO EVERYONE.

The classes are offered in various locations to provide easy access for our customers.

#### SCOTLAND COUNTY

February 6<sup>th</sup> – Sustainable Vegetable Gardening, 10 AM, Emergency Operations Center  
February 13<sup>th</sup> – Living Landscapes: Perennials, 10 AM, Economic Development Building  
February 20<sup>th</sup> – Living Landscapes: Trees and Shrubs, 10 AM, Emergency Operations Center  
February 27<sup>th</sup> – Lawns and Lawn Alternatives, 10 AM, Emergency Operations Center  
March 10<sup>th</sup> – Know and Grow African Violets, 2 PM, Scotland County Cooperative Extension  
April 25<sup>th</sup> – Scotland Extension Master Gardener Plant Sale

Scotland County Cooperative Extension is located at 231 E Cronly St, Laurinburg. Emergency Operations Center is located at 1403 West Boulevard, Laurinburg. Economic Development Building is located at 16800-A US 401, Laurinburg.

#### HOKE COUNTY

February 17<sup>th</sup> – Pruning Blueberries and Grapes  
March 17<sup>th</sup> – Pruning Crepe Myrtles  
May 2<sup>nd</sup> – Hoke Extension Master Gardener Plant Sale

All classes are at 10 a.m. at Cooperative Extension, 116 W Prospect Ave, Raeford. Contact Hoke County office of NC Cooperative Extension at 910-875-3461.

#### QUOTE:

*“The love of gardening is a seed once sown that never dies.” – Gertrude Jekyll*

***We hope you find this newsletter informative and fun. Please share with a friend!  
Send questions, comments, or suggestions for articles to [shannon\\_newton@ncsu.edu](mailto:shannon_newton@ncsu.edu).***

If you are interested in learning more about any information in this newsletter, contact your appropriate Extension Center. Hoke County Center at 910-875-3461 or visit our website at [hoke.ces.ncsu.edu](http://hoke.ces.ncsu.edu) or Scotland County Center at 910-277-2422 or visit our website at [scotland.ces.ncsu.edu](http://scotland.ces.ncsu.edu). For accommodations for persons with disabilities, contact Cooperative Extension no later than five business days before the event.

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#### ABOUT N.C. COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

North Carolina Cooperative Extension is a strategic partnership of NC State Extension, The Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA), and local government partners statewide. Extension delivers research-based education and technology from NC State and N.C. A&T that enriches the lives, land and economy of North Carolinians. Extension professionals in all 100 counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee provide educational programs specializing in agriculture, youth, communities, health and the environment.

