

Gardening News

October/November 2020



Finding the Right Native Plants for Your Landscape

“Landscaping with native plants empowers gardeners to care for nature and enhance the local environment while adding beauty and diversity to their homesites. By planting natives, gardeners support native pollinators and connect with the natural heritage of a region. Gardeners and the environment reap the most benefits from natives when gardeners understand key concepts related to the meaning of the words native plant, the value of incorporating native plants into landscapes and principles of gardening with native plants.”

Native plants are those that have grown for millennium and developed for a specific habitat. When you are thinking about choosing native plants for your landscape, think about what naturally grows in your area, soil type, the soil’s natural pH, soil moisture and shade or sun. If you think about Rhododendron, the mountains of North Carolina come to mind. Rhododendron are native to rocky soils in cool high elevations, often growing under larger trees. When trying to grow in sandy soil with lots of sun, the plant cannot do well and survive.

Nativars are cultivars of native plants. A plant breeder knows that consumers like specific plants but they may grow too tall, they may only bloom in white, or they may spread all throughout the garden. Plant breeders work to develop native plants that fit into our urban landscape, but also still have the native plant characteristics that make native plants important for our ecosystem.

When choosing native plants, select ones that mimic the natural plant. Characteristics that reduce plant attractiveness to native pollinators or leaf-feeding insects are having extra petals or being fully double flowers, being sterile (many but not all hydrangeas are sterile), having purple or highly variegated leaves, and blooming at times different than the native or wild species.

Be sure to follow some simple guidelines for gardening with native plants:

- Choose the right plant for the right place: Ensure you have picked a plant that will grow well in your garden. Consider soil type, drainage, pH, amount of sun and how much space is available for the plant to grow.
- Choose natives suited for landscaping. Not all native plants will fit into our home landscape. Some will spread and fill in the garden, while others are so specific to a location it makes them difficult to grow. Consider what space you have available and match it to the site in your landscape. After selecting plants, you will have to find out if it is commercially available and propagated in a sustainable manner.

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- Prepare the soil and help plants establish. Your home yard may match the growing conditions, but prepare the soil by loosening and ensuring the plant has the nutrients, water and mulch it needs to grow. Always take a soil test prior to planting to ensure the nutrients are available and pH is correct.
- Plan for diversity. Home landscapes are predominately lawn, foundation plantings of shrubs, and a few trees. By increasing the diversity of your landscape, you are supporting our natural ecosystem.
- Plant in layers. Don't just plant perennials or small shrubs. Think about all the layers in a natural wooded landscape. Consider a canopy layer of trees, an understory of smaller trees, then a shrub layer, an herbaceous layer (perennials, ferns, grasses, etc.) and finally the ground layer. Often, we forget that this area is just as important. The ground layer is often fallen leaves, pine needles, or plant debris and is important for wildlife of all kinds and native insects.

So, now you know what is needed, but what about specific plants. Visit these links to help you select the correct native plants for your home landscape:

NC Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox: <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/>
 NC Extension Gardener Handbook: <http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/12-native-plants>
 NC Native Plant Society: <https://ncwildflower.org/>
 Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center: <https://www.wildflower.org/>
 Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation: <https://www.xerces.org/>



American Beautyberry *Callicarpa americana*
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Leafspot on Hydrangea



Cercospora leaf spot is an infectious leaf disease that affects smooth, panicle, oakleaf and bigleaf types of hydrangea in North Carolina landscapes and nurseries. This disease is caused by the fungus *Cercospora hydrangea* and is perhaps the most common disease seen on this perennial ornamental during the months of July through October.

Although this disease can be widespread on hydrangeas in the landscape, it is generally an aesthetic problem for homeowners because the disease rarely kills the plant. Cercospora leaf spot can, if it is severe, reduce overall plant vigor by repeated defoliation. Initial infection usually occurs during May, but symptoms don't become apparent until later in the season.

Management:

Since hydrangea cultivars vary in susceptibility to Cercospora leaf spot, homeowners should select resistant varieties for new plantings. Sanitation is an important tool in disease management. Since the fungus can easily survive in infected leaves that fall and remain on the ground or that remain on the bush, removal of these leaves can help prevent future infections and disease outbreaks. Spotted leaves should be removed any time during the growing season when they are present, especially before new leaves begin to form in the spring. If possible, irrigate plants using a soaker hose or drip irrigation, since splashing water from an overhead sprinkler can spread the fungus from leaf to leaf and create an ideal environment for disease activity.

There are some fungicides available to help manage Cercospora leaf spot, but for the homeowner, disease management with fungicides is often not warranted because symptoms usually occur so late in the season.

To read the complete article visit: <https://www.uaex.edu/publications/pdf/FSA-7570.pdf>

October Gardening Chores

Seasonal Winter Color: Plant pansies, ornamental cabbage and snapdragons now for winter color. If planting in containers, be sure to refresh the soil if it has been used for a couple of years.

Bulbs: You will see fall planted bulbs in stores this time of year. That means it's time to select and plant spring-flowering bulbs, such as daffodils, hyacinths and crocuses. Tulips are treated as annuals because our winters are too warm for them. Dahlias, gladioli bulbs and other tender summer flowering bulbs need to be dug and stored this month. It's also a great time to divide your perennials. If you have too many, swap with a friend!

Houseplants: Move houseplants indoors before outdoor temperatures reach 38° F. Be sure to closely inspect your plants for insects before bringing into your home. A good spray of water before bringing them indoors can dislodge some of the insects hiding in the foliage.

Vegetables: October is an excellent time to plant cover crops for spring vegetable gardens. Clover, oats, barley and rye are excellent cover crops for spring vegetable gardens. Cover crops provide organic matter to improve your soil. Remember rye has alleopathic properties. If you are going to grow corn in the place you used rye as a cover crop, it will not do well. Legumes, such as crimson clover, will increase the nitrogen naturally in the soil.

Christmas cactus need to be brought indoors later in October. Place in a room that gets 10 hours of bright light and 14 hours of total darkness, each day. If you do this, and keep them in a cool about 65° to 70° F, the plant will set buds and bloom for you.

Fall is Best Time to Manage Fire Ants: Fire ants are here to stay, but you can minimize the number of mounds around your home and in your landscape by using one of three methods, drench, granules or baits. Drenches and granules give a quick visible result, but for best results use a bait. Look for baits with hydramethylnon or for a more organic product spinosad as the active ingredient. Newer baits such as Amdro Fire Strike and Extinguish Plus also contain both hydramethylnon and insect growth regulators (IGR), which keep queen from laying and developing ants from growing.

Follow these tips for best results with fire ant baits:

- Use fresh bait from an unopened container less than 2 years old.
- Apply baits when the ground and grass are dry and when no rain is expected for 24 hours. (Never water a bait in!)
- Apply when worker ants are actively foraging. This can be determined by putting a piece of greasy food (a chip, popcorn, or hotdog) near the mound. Check the food item in 30 minutes for activity. If ants are present, foraging is taking place.
- Treat individual mounds by sprinkling the recommended amount of product around the mound, up to 3 feet away. Do not disturb the mound while treating. Also, do not apply the bait product on top of the mound, since fire ants do not forage for food on the mound. If applied on top, this signals the queen to move to another spot, creating more mounds in your lawn or landscaped areas.

Remember you can control fire ants in your home landscape, but fire ant queens fly up to 10 miles, so expect them to come back!

November Gardening Chores

Fall Garden Clean-Up: As fall approaches, pull or control weeds, and clean up your garden. This will be helpful next spring as the new season starts. Starting next year with less weed seeds is a good thing!

Pruning: Pinch tops of pansies and snapdragons to remove stocky growth. Lantana should be pruned to one-third its height and spread. Top-heavy roses may be pruned lightly. Delay heavy pruning until late winter.

Vegetable Gardens: Watch for late season insect problems. Treat as required.

Soil Test: Take a soil test and apply needed lime for spring growth in your vegetable and flower gardens, turf area and shrub beds. Soil samples are free, except the end of November through March 31st. So, test your soil now to prepare for next spring and save some money at the same time! At that time, the fee is \$4 per sample. Pick up boxes at your local

office of NC Cooperative Extension. Return them to Cooperative Extension, and we will send to the NC Department of Agriculture. Wonder how to take a soil sample? Watch this Homegrown Video from NC State University Cooperative Extension to learn how: <https://homegrown.extension.ncsu.edu/2018/03/how-to-test-your-garden-soil/>

Garden tool maintenance can be done during this less busy time of year. Sanding, sharpening, and oiling your hand tools will preserve them for many seasons. Make sure to dip tools in a bleach/water solution (one-part bleach to three-parts water) if you had fungus issues, otherwise you will still have those issues next season. Let dry, sand off any rusty spots, then spray with oil. Which oil to use? Boiled linseed oil, Tung oil, motor oil, lamp oil, or cooking oil. Boiled linseed and Tung oil are probably the best choices, but you can use what you have available.

Lawns: Do not fertilize dormant lawns! Do not water dormant lawns unless soil becomes powder dry. Over-seeding with rye grass is harmful to lawns, especially centipede. Avoid this practice!

Clean and winterize your mower for the season. Drain gasoline or add a fuel stabilizer.

Know and Grow...

Virginia Spiderwort (*Tradescantia virginiana*)

Source: <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/tradescantia-virginiana/>

Virginia Spiderwort is an herbaceous clump-forming perennial in the dayflower family. It is native to eastern and central USA and is found in the Coastal Plain and Piedmont of NC. The plants spread by underground stolons, forming clumps, and grow 2-3 feet tall by 1 foot wide. It can be found in moist prairies, fertile woodlands, open woods, meadows, hillsides, stony bluffs, stream banks, and along roadsides.

In spring, the 3-petaled flowers appear and last for a day, but new ones are produced daily in terminal clusters. Flower colors range from blue to purple to pink. Once they have finished blooming, cut back the stems. The foliage may die back in the heat of the summer but returns in late summer to fall and often reblooms.

Virginia Spiderwort prefers moist to wet fertile sites but adapts to average garden soils in sun to shade. Provide additional water during dry periods. Use in a naturalized or woodland area, along a stream or pond, in a rain garden or the border of a native/pollinator garden. It does spread by seeds and can become prominent in your flower gardens.



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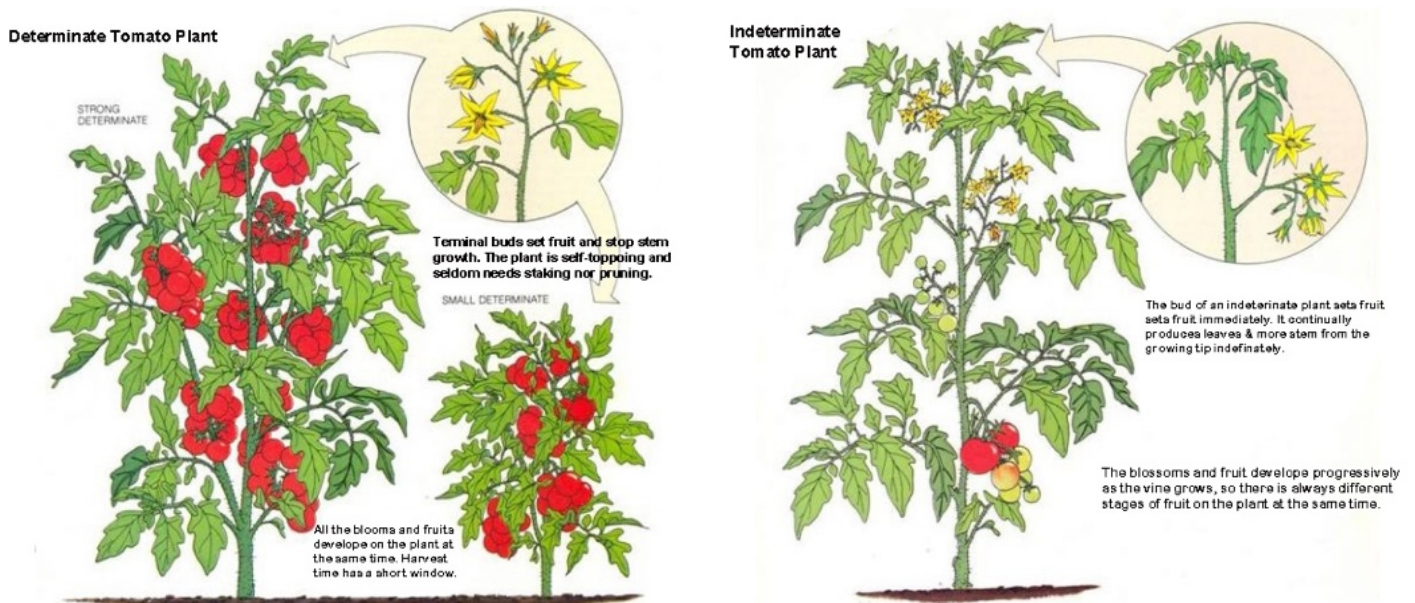


blooms, late spring, Iredell County, NC Eva Munday
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ABC....XYZ Gardening Vernacular

I is for Indeterminate

Some plants have a growth characteristic called indeterminate. This means the plant continues to grow taller and taller. One indeterminate plant you might be familiar with is tomato. Tomatoes come in indeterminate and determinate types. The determinate type of tomato grows to a specific height and flowers, then fruits are primarily produced on side shoots. Once this happens all growth is complete. Examples of determinate tomatoes are the bush type of tomatoes, with variety examples being Roma, Celebrity and Rutgers.



Source: <https://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=16937>

Indeterminate tomatoes, sometimes called vining tomatoes, will continue to grow taller all season. As they continue to grow more flowers and fruit are produced until frost. These types of tomato require staking so they do not lie on the ground. Staking will help reduce the amount of disease problems. Most of the heirloom tomatoes are indeterminate types, but remember that most of these do not have disease resistance. Some examples of indeterminate tomatoes are Beefsteak, Goldie and Cherry.

Yellow Woodsorrel or Shamrock Plant *Oxalis stricta*

You might see yellow woodsorrel blooming in your garden throughout the spring, summer, and fall. Many consider this plant a weed, as it can be found in your lawn, garden and other landscaped areas. Others consider it part of the edible landscape. Remember with any plant, be sure to correctly identify it before consuming it.

For information on foraging for backyard edibles, visit NC State University Homegrown in the Garden video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWzIS88Td0w>

One thing about weeds is they are adaptable and survivors. Woodsorrel grows in dry or moist soil, tolerates poor soils and even high pH soils. The plant spreads by rhizomes, stolons and seeds. Interestingly, when the seed's pods are touched or pulled, the pods pop open with seeds expelled up to 16 feet!



plants.ces.ncsu.edu, J. Neal

You can prevent wood sorrel from spreading by hand weeding, mulching and in some cases control with herbicides. This plant spreads by rhizomes and stolons so be sure to pull as much of the root system as possible. Even more importantly, try to keep the plant from seeding as it is difficult to control once seeded. Mulch can minimize seed from germination, so be sure to keep a 2-3 inch layer of mulch in your flower and landscape beds.

For more information on Yellow Woodsorrel visit: <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/oxalis-stricta/> and <https://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/weeds-in-turf/yellow-woodsorrel/>

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

Source: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Canada_Goose

The big, black-necked Canada Goose with its signature white chinstrap mark is a familiar and widespread bird of fields and parks. Thousands of “honkers” migrate north and south each year, filling the sky with long V-formations. But as lawns have proliferated, more and more of these grassland-adapted birds are staying put in urban and suburban areas year-round, where some people regard them as pests.



Web.stanford.edu

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Canada Geese live in great many habitats near water, grassy fields, and grain fields. Canada Geese are particularly drawn to lawns for two reasons: they can digest grass, and when they are feeding with their young, manicured lawns give them a wide, unobstructed view of any approaching predators. So, they are especially abundant in parks, airports, golf courses, and other areas with expansive lawns.

Brown Marmorated Stink Bugs

In September, Brown Marmorated Stink Bugs (BMSB) begin their search for a place to spend the winter. It is very common for them to try and spend the season inside your home's walls. Although these insects will not cause structural damage or reproduce in your home, these insects do have an unpleasant smell when crushed or vacuumed.

The best way to restrict BMSB from entering your home is to make sure there are no openings they can crawl through. View the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kG-2fetbZA> 'Exclusion and Execution' with tips and techniques to protect your home from the BMSB. Chemical control is not recommended because the insect moves quickly and new BMSB come into your home.



There are some simple nonchemical methods of minimizing the number of stink bugs entering your home. Place a trap outside. It will catch lots of these pesky insects. Some homeowners have reported an 80% reduction in stink bugs by rubbing window screens with pungent dryer sheets. You can also hang a damp towel over a lawn chair or railing overnight. Check the next morning, put all stink bugs in a bucket of soapy water. Lastly, you can also smash a few bugs outdoors. The odor warns other stink bugs that this is not such a great place to spend the winter.

For more information view the Brown Marmorated Stinkbug Frequently Asked Questions by NC State University <https://entomology.ces.ncsu.edu/faqs-brown-marmorated-stink-bug/>.

Quote

“Autumn is a second Spring, where every leaf is a flower.” – Albert Camus

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