

# Gardening News

April/May 2021



## Every Garden Has A Season: Gardening News Final Edition

When I was a small child, my mother had me tend a spot in her beautiful garden. It may not have been the best maintained flower bed, but it was one of the many steps that led to my lifelong interest in gardening.

Over the years, I have enjoyed gardening at home. As my profession, I have enjoyed helping others learn more and improve their gardening skills. Often when helping others, there has always been some tip or new way of doing gardening tasks that gardeners have shared with me. Not only have these tips helped me personally, but often I can then share them with others.



Now has come the end of my career, and I am passing the proverbial garden tools on to the next generation. Regards to you, my fellow gardeners and friends.

Happy Gardening, Shannon Newton



## Gardening Myths–Facts, Fiction, or Somewhere In-between?

Just the other day, a friend gave me a plant that I really wanted. A gardening myth is if you say ‘Thank You,’ the plant will die or not grow well. Keeping that in mind, just in case, my response to him was this plant will have a special place in my garden. After talking with several folks, there have been a variety of responses to this old wives’ tale. One friend said she accidentally said thank you and the plant she was given died. Another said they had never heard of this and always said thank you, but couldn’t say if this had any bearing on the plant’s health. An elderly lady said that she asks the person to turn their head and she will ‘steal’ the plant. Don’t know where this started, but let’s look at a few gardening myths and see if they are true or a myth.

**Myth: If I treat my yard for white grubs this year, I won’t have Japanese Beetles next year.**

Fiction - Japanese Beetles strong flying ability allows adult beetles to infest areas several miles away from where they emerge. Even though you can control Japanese beetle grubs in your yard, they will fly in from everyone else’s untreated yard.

<b>Inside</b>	
Every Garden Has a Season.....	1
Organic & Sustainable Gardening .....	2
Gardening Chores .....	3
Know and Grow .....	4
ABC...XYZ Gardening Vernacular.....	5
Weeds in the Landscape .....	6
Backyard Birds.....	7
Insect Information .....	8
Quote.....	9

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**Myth: Adding sugar to the planting hole when planting tomatoes will result in the tomatoes harvested being sweeter.**

Fiction – Tomato plants can't absorb sugar in the soil, they produce it through photosynthesis. The sugar content of a variety is predetermined in the plant's genetics.

**Myth: You need both a male & female tree in order to get fruit.**

Somewhere in between – Some fruit trees are self-sterile, meaning they will not set fruit from their own pollen. To get tree to set fruit another variety of the same fruit must be planted nearby, ideally within 50 feet. Plant breeders have developed self-pollinating trees that do not require a second variety. These trees provide their own pollen and they fertilize themselves! You can find many self-pollinating peach, apple, and pear trees.

**Myth: Ants are integral to helping peony flowers open.**

Fiction – Ants are only attracted to the sugary secretions produced by the peony bud and do nothing to help the flower open. In exchange for the nectar, ants help keep away other insect pests that may damage the flowers. If cutting peonies for flower arrangements, simply dip buds in water to help remove the ants.

**Myth: Use salt in an asparagus patch to help control weeds.**

Fiction – Asparagus are relatively salt tolerant. Even so, using salt in an asparagus patch can eventually cause excessive salt buildup in the soil causing both plant damage and soil structure damage.

**Myth: Apply turf fertilizer early in the spring to help encourage new growth.**

Fiction – Early spring turf fertilizer encourages top growth at the expense of root growth. Good root growth is necessary for turf survival through the summer. Fertilize Centipede in mid-June, St. Augustine in mid-May, Bermuda and Zoysia when turf fully greens-up. For best results, take a soil sample and follow recommendations applying at these recommended times.

**Myth: You should always amend the backfill when planting trees.**

Fiction – You should only amend the backfill in heavy clay soils. Otherwise, use the native soil to backfill the planting hole. Amending the soil can restrict outwards root growth as it can be easier to grow in the amended soil and the difference between the amended soil and the native existing soils can restrict water movement.

**Myth: Nothing grows under a walnut tree.**

Fact – This is one old wives' tale grounded in truth. The black walnut, *Juglans nigra*, produces a chemical that destroys or deters plant competition, a process known as allelopathy.

**Myth: Plant potatoes only on Good Friday.**

Fiction – Good Friday is the Friday before Easter Sunday, and Easter Sunday occurs at different times in March and April in any given year. Potatoes are native to the Andes of South America and weren't introduced to Europe until the 1500s. Irish potatoes in Hoke and Scotland Counties should be planted between mid-February to mid-March.

**Myth: A bowl of beer in the garden attracts snails and slugs and drowns them.**

Fact – Snails and slugs will be attracted to the beer and drown in the container. However, they are attracted by many things. It is the trap that will kill them, not just the bait. You could attract these pests with grapefruit rinds, banana peels, a damp wooden board, etc.

**Myth: Cover newly pruned areas with varnish, tar or paint.**

Fiction – There really isn't a way to keep fungal organisms out of a new cut. In about half of the situations where these wound dressings are used, the tree's heartwood decays faster than it would have without the topical application. Instead, simply make a clean cut just outside the branch collar and leave it alone. If pruned properly, trees can take advantage of natural defense mechanisms to ward off most decay problems.

**Myth: Organic pesticides are less toxic than synthetic ones.**

Somewhere in between – Misused pesticides can be harmful, regardless of whether they are considered natural or synthetic. Pyrethrum, for example, is made from chrysanthemums but is still toxic to people and pets when handled improperly. Whenever possible, it's best to select the least toxic control option available because, even if not lethal, many of these pesticides can cause serious health complications. Safe storage of these products can help prevent any harmful accidents. Read and follow all label directions, and remember that these products are tools, not miracle workers or silver bullets. Pesticides cannot correct mistakes made in plant selection, installation, or maintenance.

Visit <http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/pests/pdf/hgic2770.pdf> for an article on less toxic pesticides.

**Myth: Newly planted trees need to be staked and guy-wired.**

Fiction – Staking a tree can hinder its proper development. Allowing the tree to sway in the wind encourages the development of stronger stabilizing roots. If staked, the tree may become dependent on this support, preventing the root

system from becoming strong and healthy. If it is truly necessary, tie the trunk loosely to the stake using fabrics such as T-shirts or bicycle inner tubes to avoid damaging the bark, and remove the support after one growing season. Visit <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/planting-techniques-for-trees-and-shrubs> for complete information on planting trees and shrubs.

Visit the following link to check-out complete researched based information on gardening myths from Washington State University: <https://puyallup.wsu.edu/lcs/>

## April Gardening Chores

### Lawns

- This is the month to begin fertilizing Bermuda grass and Zoysia lawns. Application rates: Bermuda 1/2 to 1 pound of actual Nitrogen/1000 sq ft, Zoysia 1/2 Nitrogen/ 1000 sq ft, Centipede NO fertilizer at this time. Make sure the lawn is green and growing before you apply fertilizer.
- If you have not soil tested in the past two years, do so this month before fertilizing to see if additional nutrients or lime are needed. Soil samples are free from April 1<sup>st</sup> to the end of November each year. Pick up and return your soil sample boxes at NC Cooperative Extension Office.
- Water and fertilize carefully — applying too much water and fertilizer encourages large patch, a destructive fungal disease of lawns.
- Adjust your mower to the correct mowing height for your turf type: Centipede 1" and do NOT burn off Centipede, Zoysia 1 1/2 to 2 1/2", Bermuda, 3/4 to 1" mowing height.
- All warm season grasses can be sodded from April-July.

### Trees and Shrubs

- Newly planted trees require regular watering through their first summer and continue watering during drought in the second year. Apply 2-3 gallons per inch of trunk diameter to the root ball at least once a week if it does not rain.
- Mulch trees and shrubs to help reduce summer weeds. Apply a 3-4" layer out to the drip line but do not pile against trunks. Too much mulch (over 4") can repel water.

### Vegetables and Herbs

- Prepare garden beds before planting. Till in compost and fertilizer. Add lime ONLY if recommended by soil test reports.
- Set out young pepper and tomato plants in late April. Wait a few more weeks before setting out cold sensitive eggplant and basil plants. Our last frost is typically around April 15<sup>th</sup> all these plants will not tolerate freezing temperatures.
- Direct sow seeds of green beans, Lima's, field peas, cucumbers, squash, zucchini, winter squash, and sweet corn.
- Keep an eye out for Colorado potato beetle larvae on potato leaves.
- Harvest garden peas, sugar snaps, and snow peas every few days.

### Fruits

- Tie blackberries to a support trellis in preparation for active growth.
- Thin fruit on apple, peach, and pear trees to increase fruit size, prevent limb breakage and reduce insect/disease problems. Fruit should be thinned when they are about the size of a nickel.

## May Gardening Chores

### Flowers

- Wait until mid-month to set out summer annuals and summer blooming bulbs.
- Newly planted flowers will benefit from liquid fertilization the first few weeks, in addition to slow-release fertilizer applied at planting time.
- Aphids are a common spring pest on many flowers. Wait a few weeks before treating to see if ladybugs move in to control them.

### Lawns

- Fertilize centipede and St. Augustine lawns at a rate of 1/2 lb. nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft., which is equal to 10 lbs. of 5-0-15 per 1,000 sq. ft.
- Leave clippings on the lawn – they return nutrients and water to the soil and do not contribute to thatch.

- Thatch build-up is the result of over fertilization. If your lawn has a thatch layer thicker than a half inch, power rake in May to remove thatch.
- Aerate lawns only if the soil has become compacted.
- Frequent mowing encourages lawns to thicken and reduces weed problems.
- Spray broadleaf weeds with a post emergent herbicide. The best product to use will depend on the weeds you are trying to control and your turf type. Do not use 2,4-D on centipede lawns.

### Trees and Shrubs

- Bagworms hatch in May. They feed on and defoliate conifers. Treat plants if they were infested last year.
- Shear formal hedges.
- If needed, prune spring blooming shrubs like azaleas, camellias, Indian hawthorn, and oakleaf hydrangea after they finish flowering but before mid-July.
- Keep an eye on dogwoods, deciduous magnolias (tulip trees), crape myrtle, and viburnum for powdery mildew.

### Flowers

- Let leaves of spring flowering bulbs die back naturally, so they can manufacture enough food for next year's blooms.
- Replace winter flowers (pansies, snapdragons, etc.) with heat loving annuals like coleus, sweet potato vine and vinca.

### Vegetables and Herbs

- It is now safe to plant peanuts, okra, and melons outside.
- Set out sweet potato slips or transplants but protect them from the deer!
- Harvest onions, garlic, and potatoes when their tops start to die back. Potatoes are starting to produce when they start blooming. Resist the urge to dig new potatoes too soon.
- Be prepared to start spraying zucchini and squash for squash vine borer in mid-May. Borers often start being seen around this time. Once in the stem, it is difficult to control them.
- Mulch around vegetable plants to conserve moisture and reduce disease problems.
- Sow buckwheat or other cover crops in empty areas for a quick cover crop.

### Fruits

- Control weeds around fruit plants by mulching, hand weeding, and spraying herbicides if necessary.
- All fruit plants require 1" of water per week during the growing season for good production. In sandy soils, apply water in 2 to 3 applications of 1/2 to 1/3" each.

## Know and Grow...

### Asian vs. European Pears

When selecting an ornamental tree for your home landscape, don't forget that fruit trees often make a beautiful and edible statement in your yard. Pears can be long lived, have beautiful flowers in the spring, while producing an edible and delicious fruit.

When selecting a pear tree of any type, be sure to check the variety for resistance to fire blight. This is the number one cause of tree failure. For complete information on fire blight, visit: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/fire-blight>.

#### European Pears (*Pyrus communis*)

The only native apple or pear in North America is *Malus* species or crabapple. All European Pears have been brought to American. Modern plant breeding programs have increased yield and resistance to fire blight.

European Pears are unique in that they do not ripen on the tree. Harvest and store either until ripening occurs. Commercial growers pick on specific dates based on the variety of the plant, store them in either a plastic or paper for 7 to 10 days. They then are refrigerated to slow down ripening.



### Asian Pears (*Pyrus pyrifera*)

Asian pears ripen on the tree like apples. They are ready to eat when harvested. When buying Asian Pears at the market, often they are picked prior to ripening. Remember Asian Pears will not ripen after they are picked from the tree.

### Biennial Fruiting

European and Asian pears are notorious for “biennial bearing”. A tree may overproduce one year, and yield a small crop the next (the ‘off’ year). Biennial bearing in the “on” year often results in limb breakage and smaller fruits. To prevent or break the biennial bearing cycle, remove excess fruits by hand within 30 days after full bloom in the “on” year. As a rule, one pear fruit is supported by 30-40 leaves. (source: What Grows There, Dr. Hugh Conlon)



### Harvesting

Expect a healthy young tree to produce 5 to 15 pounds of fruit, a 5-year-old tree 30 to 50 pounds, and a mature tree, from 100 to 400 pounds. Wait to harvest fruit until its background color has changed but the fruit is still firm, then begin tasting it for peak flavor. If the fruit is picked too soon, the sugars won't develop fully. However, don't wait until the fruit is soft, or it will be overripe and spongy. Never pull fruit off the tree; wait until it lifts off effortlessly. The tender skin also bruises easily, so handle fruit gently. (source: National Gardening Association)

### Planting and Fertilizing European and Asian Pears

Plant trees in late winter or early spring. Set so graft it is 2” above the soil line. Mulch in the spring, but be sure to keep mulch about 2” from the trunk of the tree. Most damage to the home landscape is from lawn mowers and string trimmers. Mulching will hold down weeds, keep moisture in and prevent lawn mower-itis. Applying fertilizer according to soil test results is your best option. Use the 2-foot rule for fertilization. If your tree is growing more than 2’ per year, you are applying too much nitrogen. This can cause disease problems and damage to early spring growth from frost. Complete information on growing pears in North Carolina can be found at: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/north-carolina-production-guide-for-smaller-orchard-plantings>.

## ABC...XYZ Gardening Vernacular

### N is for Native Plants

What exactly are native plants? Why are they important? For complete information on native plants and their place in the landscape including specific plants, visit: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook/12-native-plants>



Native plants are those species that evolved naturally in a region without human intervention. Red maple (*Acer rubrum*) flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) and butterfly weed (in photo at left) (*Asclepias tuberosa*) are examples of the over 3,900 species of plants the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) PLANTS lists as native to North Carolina. These plants developed and adapted to local soil and climate conditions over thousands of years and are vital parts of local ecosystems necessary for the survival of pollinators, insects, birds, mammals, and other wildlife.

Plants are not considered native to a region within decades or even centuries after introduction. To be native, they must originate in the region and co-evolve with other species over thousands of years. As these species evolve together, they adapt to the physical environment formed by local climate and weather conditions, soil types, topography, and hydrology.

Native plants form interdependent, highly specialized relationships with other organisms that are necessary for each other's survival. Replacing natives with plants from other regions cannot replicate the complex interactions that naturally occur.

Glen, C.D. 2018. Native Plants, Chapter 12. In: K.A. Moore, and L.K. Bradley (eds). North Carolina Extension Gardener Handbook. NC State Extension, Raleigh, NC. <<http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/12-native-plants>>

## Three Pesky Weeds in Your Landscape Plantings and Lawns

### Chamber Bitter (*Phyllanthus urinaria*)

Chamber Bitter is native to tropical East Africa. This weed is a small plant with leaves like a mimosa. It can be found in most landscapes in North Carolina and throughout the southeast. It grows in turf, shrub beds and most anywhere. The best method of control is mechanical; pulling by hand. You can also apply two to three inches of mulch to cover the seeds from the previous season. Chamber Bitter seeds require light to germinate, so mulching is an effective control. Do not put into your compost pile, as the seeds may still be able to germinate. Below is a link for an article from Clemson University on Chamber Bitter and includes chemical control methods. Chamber Bitter is a weed that is here to stay, so learn to identify it and manage it in your home landscape.



<http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/pests/pdf/hgic2314.pdf>

### Ouch... It's Lawn Burweed! (*Soliva sessilis*)

My Mother used to say, once the dogwoods bloom, we could go barefoot! Don't know if many people still go barefoot, but if you look at the picture of lawn burweed, it appears to be soft and gentle on the toes! This weed of turf is one of the many low growing plants that will fill in where you have bare spots in your lawn.

One of the problems with Lawn Burweed is it produces seed with sharp spines making going barefoot difficult. Maybe that is why it is also called spurweed and sticker weed. It will also grow to large patches in your lawn.

Lawn Burweed is a winter annual. Winter annuals germinate in the fall and overwinter in the turf or shrub beds as small plants. Once the temperatures begin to warm, plants grow rapidly, produce seed and die during our hot summer months, once temperatures reach 90 degrees.

Control Lawn Burweed in December, January and February. The best way to control weeds in turf is to maintain a dense healthy lawn by applying lime and fertilizer following recommendations from a soil sample results. Also, mow at the appropriate height and frequency.

Lawn Burweed is growing now and may be in your turf area. To control apply a post-emergence herbicide during the winter months. This is because the weed is smaller, easier to control, and the sharp burrs have not developed. Control is not impossible in March, April and May but spines have already formed the burr or seed and this will remain in your lawn. For complete information on controlling Lawn Burweed, follow this link:

<https://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/pests/pdf/hgic2323.pdf>. Please be sure to read and follow all label directions.

### Common Lespedeza (*Lespedeza striata*)

Common lespedeza, also known as Japanese clover, (*Lespedeza striata*) is a very common summer weed that can easily choke out thin turf. Lespedeza is a mat-forming and grows close to the ground, making it difficult to cut with a mower. It flowers in late summer with pink to purple, single flowers.

### Cultural Control

Maintain a dense, actively growing turf through proper mowing, fertilizing and watering practices. You can find a lawn maintenance calendar for your specific type of grass at [turffiles.ncsu.edu](http://turffiles.ncsu.edu). Click-on the left tab that says 'Grasses' and select calendar for your specific type of grass. Core aeration and traffic control will reduce compaction and encourage your grass to



Photo: Rebekah D. Wallace, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org

compete better. It is best to control this summer annual broadleaf weed in late spring or early summer because it is easier to control at this time. Increasing the mowing height with all the other cultural recommendations will help minimize lespedeza's spread.

Hand pulling is an option, especially in landscape beds where herbicides pose a possible threat to desirable plants.

### Chemical Control

In Lawns: Cultural controls should first be implemented before applying herbicides for lespedeza control. However, if after taking steps to modify lawn care techniques, chemical control may still be necessary to further reduce the lespedeza population. Herbicides should be carefully chosen according to turf species and all label instructions followed.

A three-way herbicide can be used on bermudagrass, zoysiagrass, centipede grass, St. Augustine grass and tall fescue. The active ingredients of a three-way herbicide often include the following broadleaf weed killers: 2, 4-D, dicamba, and mecoprop (MCPP).

Caution: Be especially careful with these products if you have centipede grass. Consider spot spraying and make sure that a rate is listed for centipede grass. Centipede grass can be damaged by 2, 4-D. Application timing is critical. Make sure that centipede grass is fully greened up before applying and follow all label directions.

Read more at: <https://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/weeds-in-turf/common-lespedeza/> and <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/lespedeza/>.

## Is It a Red Bellied or Red Headed Woodpecker?



So, both of these birds have red heads, which is red bellied and which is red headed?

The Red Bellied Woodpecker is a common sight in our forests and can occasionally be found at your bird feeder. If you live near any wooded patches, you may be able to attract them using feeders filled with suet (in winter), peanuts, and sometimes sunflower seeds. They've even been spotted drinking nectar from hummingbird feeders. Red Bellied Woodpeckers have a red cap with black and white striped back. When it flies, its wing tips have white patches. They hitch along limbs and trunks of trees, more than pecking at the trunk, but its long beak is excellent for pecking into wood for insects. It gets its name from the slightly reddish tint on its belly feathers.

Red Headed Woodpeckers are a stunning bird with a crimson head, a snow-white body, and half white, half inky black wings. These birds don't act quite like most other woodpeckers: they're adept at catching insects in the air, and they eat lots of acorns and beech nuts, often hiding away extra food in tree crevices for later. Red-headed Woodpeckers occasionally visit feeders in winter, especially if suet is present. They will eat seeds, corn, acorns, beechnuts, pecans, and

many kinds of fruits (including apples, pears, cherries, blackberries, raspberries, strawberries, grapes, mulberries, and poison ivy fruits).

The answer is on the left, Red-bellied Woodpecker, on the right is Red Headed Woodpecker.

(source [www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org))

## What's Causing the White Spots on My Azalea Leaves? Azalea Lace Bugs

Azaleas grow well in our area, with our USDA Hardiness Zone 8 and naturally acidic soils, when planted in a shady area, azaleas will flourish. Even with the best growing conditions, sometimes insect pests become a problem. When azaleas are planted too deeply, pH is higher than 6 or planted in the full sun, azaleas are more prone to having insect pests.



Pest and Disease Image Library, Bugwood.org

Jim Baker, NCSU, Bugwood.org

Azalea Lace bug is the number one pest of azaleas. According to Dr. Steve Frank, Professor and Extension Specialist of Entomology at NC State University, "Azalea lace bug is found, to some degree, on most azaleas in the landscape. Damage may give the foliage a chlorotic bleached appearance. Many azaleas with problems are not planted correctly. Reduce the plant stress by providing the proper growing conditions and shade for azaleas. A diverse or more complex landscape may have fewer lace bug problems. Eggs hatch in spring so insecticides applied in spring may reduce lace bug abundance and damage. Systemic and contact insecticides are available for the appropriate situations."

Lace bugs are very small, about 1/8" long and 1/16" wide. You find them often on the underside of the leaves. They have a piercing mouth part, which leaves what looks like yellowish dots that can eventually make the leaf look bleached on the upper surface of the leaves. The lower leaf surface will be covered with shiny, black spots of excrement, egg fragments, and cast skins. These diagnostic signs will be present even if the insects have left the leaf. Heavy populations can severely weaken a tree or shrub making it more susceptible to other problems.

Lace bugs have several natural enemies that feed on them. These include lacewings, assassin bugs, spiders, and predaceous mites. However, when lace bug populations get out of hand using chemical controls is necessary. Always read the label carefully since some of insecticides are not safe to use on all plants. Consider using Insecticidal soap or other less toxic options for control of lace bugs. The NC Ag Chemical Manual recommends bifenthrin, imidacloprid, permethrin and others as insecticides for controlling lace bugs. Incorrect usage can severely damage the foliage or even kill the plant. Whenever spraying a shrub infested with lace bugs remember that they feed only on the underside of the leaves. This means that the spray must be directed to the underside of the leaves to achieve satisfactory control. The nymphs hatch during February and March and many adults are present by April and May. A second application in 7-10 days may be needed to kill late hatching nymphs or adults that migrate to the shrub from adjacent areas.

## Quote

*“Gardening adds years to your life and life to your years.” – Unknown*

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