

## Are You a Plant Killer? It's All Right; There's Help

by Wendi Hartup, Extension Agent

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There is something meditative about gardening. You can clear your mind of worries and concentrate on making your garden and yard just right. You may think you are a plant killer but still enjoy getting your fingers dirty.

Most of the time, we plant killers do not always take the time to read instructions. Like fireflies to light, we get caught up in all the pretty plants at the store and buy loads of them. Once home, we then realize we have no idea how or where they should go in our yards or how to keep them happy. With any luck maybe half survive from pot to ground. Plant killers want very low-maintenance landscapes.

There is a not-so-secret set of principles you can incorporate into any yard or landscape to make it healthier, minimize time, energy and money and help protect the environment.

- ✿ Right plant, right place — North Carolina's soil types, temperature ranges and rainfall patterns differ dramatically from region to region. Different conditions often exist in the same yard so you need to get outside and start observing and taking notes.
- ✿ Recycle — In a Carolina yard, grass clippings, leaves and yard trimmings are recycled rather than thrown away. By recycling yard debris, we gain free mulch and return valuable nutrients to the soil.
- ✿ Water Efficiently — A truly efficient way to use water in a yard is to design the yard so that it thrives predominantly on rainfall. Even if your yard has a lawn and specialty gardens, it is possible to design it so you can water the plants "as needed."

- ✿ Mulch — There are a variety of mulches available but they all serve the purpose of keeping moisture in the soil, moderating temperatures, reducing erosion, controlling weeds and providing aesthetic appeal. Keep a maximum of 3-inches organic mulch around trees, shrubs, and in planted beds.
- ✿ Fertilize appropriately — Many trees and plants demand little or no fertilizer once they are established and mature. When over applied, fertilizers aggravate insect and disease problems and force excessive growth, which must be mowed or pruned.
- ✿ Manage yard pests — Don't strive for an insect, disease and weed-free yard. Many insects are beneficial, helping to keep pests under natural control. Learn to identify beneficial insects. Many of those misplaced plants we call weeds are the first flowers available for pollinators!
- ✿ Reduce stormwater runoff — Keeping rain and sprinkler water on our yards and out of storm drains reduces pollution. Because water washes off our yards, install grassy swales and rain gardens on your property.
- ✿ Attract wildlife — Providing adequate food, water and shelter can increase the number and variety of species that live in your yard.

As you learn to incorporate these simple principles into your landscape, you will save time and money. Those new to gardening, plant killers and even seasoned gardeners [can learn more in a Carolina Yards and Neighborhoods program.](#)

## Accepting the Shade Garden

Many gardening conversations start up as discussions about gardening in the shade. Gardeners complain that they can't grow anything in the shade. However, if they can accept that they are dealing with a shady area and that is not going to change, then they can be successful with having a beautiful shady landscape. There is a whole different spectrum of plants that grow in the shade that many people are not aware of. If we can focus on the positive aspects of the shade garden and spend time with research, we will have accepted our shade garden and capitalized on the opportunities. We will take a look at some of these.

The **overhead canopy** of the trees that give us our shade also protects us from the harsh sun in midsummer in the Piedmont. We will have a cooler climate to do our gardening tasks and can handle working and spending a longer time outside in our gardens which makes for a happy gardener! Large trees moderate our home and garden from the weather extremes of a hot summer or a cold winter wind.

Deciduous **shrubs and trees** will give you a great display of fall color and you will have an abundance of dried leaves for making compost and leaf mold for use in the landscape. The plants that grow well in shade will grow slowly and require less frequent pruning once they mature. They will also use less water due to a lower metabolism.

The many different **textures** become just as much of a focus in the garden as bloom. Plants such as ferns, ligularia, and hosta give us a long season of interest. Fine and bold textures can be added by choosing different understory trees and shrubs. Plants that bloom may be less in number but will last much longer in the shade. A lot of natives in the shade are more fragrant, possibly due to it being more difficult to attract insects to shady areas. Think of using natives such as sweet shrub, azaleas and witch hazel.

Fewer **pests** are found in the shade because most insects and weeds prefer full sun. Of course there are exceptions, such as scale and slugs. So watch out for scale buildup. In the long run, you will be using fewer pesticides in your shade garden.

A different **color pallet** will work many times in the shade garden. Pastels can be a focal. Pure white, blues, pinks, purples and creams will make a wonderful color display.

One of the problems I often encounter is people asking where can I find a good selection of shade loving plants? We are fortunate to have many local nurseries to choose from, such as Frank's Perennial Border, Sedge Garden Nursery, Myers Greenhouse and L.A. Reynolds Garden Center. With some planning and visits to our local nurseries you will be able to create a wonderful shady retreat in your home landscape, just perfect to relax, reflex, and enjoy friends.

## Tips For Buying Transplants

Either starting flowers for your garden indoors to be used as transplants or just purchasing transplants will really extend the season of flowers in the Piedmont since we have a longer growing season than northern states. Transplants or bedding plants, as they are sometimes called, are usually grown in flats of 24 up to 72 plants per tray. They may be individual pots or subdivided into cell packs of 2 or more per pack. Let's take a look at some tips that will help you in deciding which transplants are best for you to use in your garden whether the plant is an edible or a non-edible.

- ✿ Usually the larger the cell the larger the plant and roots. If you have a choice, pick a deep cell over a shallow one when purchasing.
- ✿ Look for fresh, healthy, quality plants for a good start to the garden.
- ✿ Choose bedding plants with stocky stems, proportioned, with leaf color a rich green.
- ✿ If the lower leaves are yellow, that is usually an indication of inadequate watering.
- ✿ For faster color in the flower bed, choose transplants grown in 4 or 6 inch pots with more buds than blooms. They should have a more established root system.
- ✿ It is best to transplant on an overcast day or the coolest part of the day.
- ✿ When removing plants from the cell pack take care when separating plants to avoid damaging roots, if there are too many roots you will need to loosen them.
- ✿ Before removing the plants for transplanting, check the soil in the cell packs. If dry water thoroughly. Plants should pop out easily when the pack or pot is turned upside down. If not, gently squeeze the bottom of the cell to loosen the roots.
- ✿ Loosen the soil to a depth of 6-8 inches before transplanting.
- ✿ Handle the plant by the root ball and set it in the soil at the same depth as the cell pack. An exception is tomatoes, which can be set deeper.
- ✿ Firm the soil around the transplant in the ground then water immediately after transplanting.
- ✿ Newly transplanted vegetables need daily attention until they get established. Water when the soil surface begins to feel dry.



## Choosing Crops for the Community Garden *by Mary Jac Brennan, Extension Agent, Community Gardens*

The average last frost in Forsyth County is April 15th and it will soon be time to plant the summer vegetables in the community garden. How do you decide which crops to grow?

The decision process doesn't have to be complicated, but you do need to take into account some of the following considerations.

What is the style of your garden? Are you growing in raised beds? Do you lease an individual 4 x 8 plot? Are you gardening a large communal plot? What is the mission of your community garden? Are you growing for a food pantry? And last, but not least, what do you like to eat?

### Growing in Raised Beds

Community gardeners that are growing their gardens in raised beds are practicing intensive garden culture, and need to pay strict attention to maintaining excellent soil conditions. (Soil improvement practices will be discussed in a future article). Selecting crops that have a compact habit of growth is critical for managing the limited space of the raised bed. Consider growing vining vegetables vertically on trellises to maximize your bed space and to be a good neighbor to the other plot owners in the garden.



Some suggested plants and varieties to grow in raised beds are 'Bush Blue Lake' Green Beans, 'Bush Romano' Green Beans, 'Tender Crop' Green Beans, 'Henderson Bush' Lima Beans, 'Jackson' Lima Beans, 'Wonder Bush' Beans, 'Salad Bush' Cucumber, 'Patio Pik' Cucumber, 'Spacemaster' Cucumber, 'Pot Luck' Cucumber, 'Slim Jim' Eggplant, Sweet Banana Pepper, Yolo Wonder Pepper, Long Red Cayenne Pepper, 'Scallopini' Squash, 'Tiny Tim' Tomato, 'Small Fry' Tomato, 'Sweet 100 Patio' Tomato, 'Burpee's Pixie' Tomato, 'Toy Boy' Tomato, 'Early Girl' Tomato, and 'Betty Boy VFN' Tomato.

Some suggested plants for trellising in the raised bed are 'Marketer' Cucumber, 'National Pickling' Cucumber, 'Kentucky Wonder 191' Pole Beans, and winter Squashes such as Acorn, Butternut, and Spaghetti types.

### Growing in a Communal Plot

For community gardens with communal plots, or one big garden plot, consider the purpose of the garden and your volunteer base. Some community gardens donate a portion of their harvest to pantries that are serving

people with food access issues. Select nutrient dense vegetables which make good choices for donation. Crops such as Southern Peas and Sweet potatoes are full of nutrients, and will store well for later distribution, should you have a



bumper crop. Both of these vegetables can be planted from May 1-15 when the soil is warm. Southern Peas, or field peas make a great cover crop, as well as providing peas which can be picked and used fresh, frozen, or allowed to dry for easy storage. Sweet potatoes need less intensive care through the growing season. You could schedule a big planting party with your gardeners, use less volunteer labor through the growing season, and then have a harvest gathering when the potatoes are ready to dig before frost. Make the event fun by including a guessing game of the total harvest weight and give a prize for the person who comes closest!

Many community gardens will include typical summer garden crops like tomatoes, peppers, okra, green beans, summer and winter squash, and cucumbers. These crops will require more time with weeding, watering, scouting for pests, and harvesting, but will reward the gardeners with produce all summer long. Chores, such as mulching your plants, can be timed to maximize your efforts in the community garden.

The 'Variety Selection Quick Reference Guide for Forsyth County' is an excellent leaflet to consult for more detailed information on suggested varieties, planting dates, and planting specifics for each crop.

Visit the Forsyth Community Gardening website at: <http://forsyth.cc/CES/Gardening> and check out the resource page for a link to this leaflet.

Be sure to include flowers and herbs in your community garden. Flowers will attract pollinators and beneficial insects, and add beauty to the garden. Herbs make a tasty addition to the harvest and can be used to flavor your vegetable dishes. Many herbs make delicious teas.

Expand your palate by growing something new. Whether it is a new variety of heirloom tomato, or a new kind of pepper, you may be pleasantly surprised with your results. Share a favorite recipe with one of your fellow community gardeners and plan a community meal from the garden. Fresh produce never tasted better than when you grow it, pick it, prepare it, and share it with others from your very own garden.

## From the Master Gardener Hotline - Troubleshooting Daffodils

*Bert Lantz, Master Gardener Volunteer*

Recently a woman called and indicated that some of her daffodils were not blooming like they had in previous years. The plants had been in the same area for a number of years, and while the foliage appeared to be healthy, the bloom production seemed to be less and less each year.

There are a number of reasons why this might occur. If plants have not been fed in a couple of years, flower production may diminish. Daffodils should be lightly fertilized every year when the emerging leaves are 3"-4" high. A balanced fertilizer such as 5-10-10 can be used or a product such as Bulbtone, Bone Meal or Super Phosphate can be effective. Feeding with a high-nitrogen fertilizer encourages leaf growth, but may reduce flower production.

It is also important that after blooming, the foliage should be left on the plant until it turns yellow. When plant leaves are cut back too soon or tied off the previous year it can cause poor flower production. Daffodil bulbs replenish for approximately six weeks after blooming, and need this time to rebuild.

It is possible that bulbs may be weakened by basal rot if they are planted in a wet area. Bulbs may also become



diseased. The most common diseases are yellow stripe which shows as a fine yellow streak along the entire leaf and mosaic which appears as white blotches on the yellow flowers. Both diseases are incurable, and the infected bulbs should be dug and thrown away. However, when the leaf appears to be healthy, it usually indicates there is some other reason that daffodils are not flowering.

One of the most common problems related to poor flower production develops when bulbs have been growing in the same location for a number of years. Daffodil bulbs normally divide every year or two which can result in clumps of bulbs competing for the same nutrients. These clumps can become compacted causing the plants to stop blooming. To correct this, wait until the foliage turns yellow, dig the bulbs, divide them into individual bulbs and replant them immediately in a sunny location. The bulbs should be planted about 6" apart and about 6" deep. It is also possible to dry the bulbs in a shady area and store them in a mesh bag in a cool dark place and then replant them in the fall. Dried bulbs may also be stored in a box covered with dry mulch and kept in a cool location until it is time to replant.