North Carolina Cooperative Extension

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GardenWise

Inside this issue:

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R. Craig Mauney
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Ornamental Grasses *by Craig Mauney, Horticulture Agent*

Ornamental grasses are becoming popular perhaps because they are easy to grow and beautiful. They look great year round because they change with the season. When looking for ornamental grasses, decide whether you need a runner or clumper type. Runners tend to be more invasive. Clumpers work well for a limited space. Watch out for the spread of grasses from seeds as well. Part of the appeal of ornamental grasses is their diversity; some have plumes others don't. Some are low – others very tall. Colors include green, of course, but also yellow, blues, grays, and even red. Most ornamental grasses prefer full sun but some will grow in partly-shade areas. A few actually prefer shade. Keep them watered and like ordinary grass they need nitrogen. But the good thing is you don't have to mow them every week. Just shear them down in early spring or late winter. Some of the more common ornamental grasses used in our area include:

Blue Fescue (*Festuca ovina* var. *glauca*) – Native to Europe. Clumping fescue blue-gray in color. Great for a small grouping in the landscape or as an edging plant. This grass is non-invasive.

Little Bluestem (*Schizachvrium scoparium*) – Native to North America. Gray-green leaf blades that turn purple, red, and orange in the fall. Likes full sun and well-drained soil and can get 3 feet tall.

Purple Millet – (*Pennisetum glaucum*) – Not Native to North America. Grows in full sun or part shade. Grown as an annual but is incredibly tough and has burgundy foliage with fuzzy cattails. This grass attracts birds.

Purple Fountaingrass – (*Pennisetum setaceum* 'Purpurreum') Not native to North America. This one is grown as an annual and is a favorite of gardeners because of its burgundy-red foliage all season. Great for a container garden. Grows up to 3 feet tall.

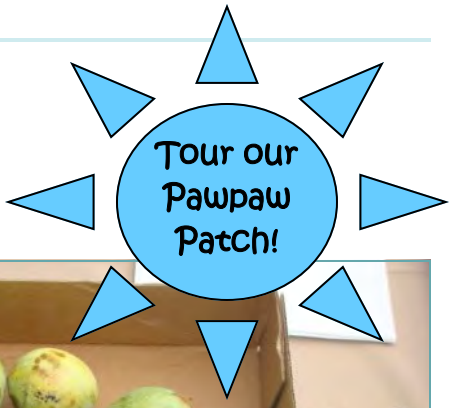
Purple Fountaingrass

Oat Grass (*Helictotrichon sempervirens*) – Native to Europe. Has showy silver-blue foliage. Great for companion to rudbeckia, sedums, and sages. Can be invasive in good growing conditions so be careful if you are using and remove the seed heads in early fall/ winter.

Oat Grass

(Continued on page 2)

NC Pawpaw Festival to be held at Forsyth Cooperative Extension



The 6th annual pawpaw festival will be held Saturday, August 24th from10:00 – 1:00 at the Forsyth County Cooperative Extension office at 1450 Fairchild Road in Winston-Salem. As in the past, free foods made with pawpaw such as cookies, breads, and ice cream will be available as long as they last. Speeches will be given throughout the morning on pawpaw culture, folklore, nutrition, and commercial production. New this year are tours of the 4 year old pawpaw orchard which will be given throughout the morning. Come join us and learn more about North America's largest native fruit that was a favorite of George Washington.

Neal Peterson to Speak at Pawpaw Festival

Neal Peterson, a plant geneticist from West Virginia, will be speaking at this year's NC Pawpaw Festival and if there is anyone on earth who knows pawpaws, this man is the guru. While studying at West Virginia University in the mid 1970's Neal, tasted his first pawpaw and has been hooked ever since. This experience led him down a road to assemble the world's largest pawpaw collection. Neal discovered through research that there had been a contest sponsored by the Journal of Heredity in 1916 that uncovered scores of exceptional pawpaw clones from all over their native range. Neal traveled the back roads of Illinois, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia and many other places in search of genetic material that would hopefully still be around from this time period. There were several well known collectors in these states in the early 1900's.

After collecting material, Neal started a orchard at the Wye Research station in Maryland in the early 1980's with the purpose in mind of finding exceptional clones that might interest commercial production. And hopefully help lead North America's largest native fruit down a path that the blueberry and pecan has successfully been taken. In the 1990's, selecting was started and in the mid 2000's Neal made available 6 new varieties from his collection of over 1500 trees. These are exceptional varieties, named after US river systems, that have been chosen not only because of excellent flavor but also because they are productive, healthy and the fruits contain fewer seed than most.

Please come out on Saturday, August the 24th to meet Neal Peterson and hear his story.

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Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides*) – Native to North America. Easiest grass to grow. Different colors available. Great as an accent plant or in group plantings. This grass can self sow.

Fiber Opticgrass – (*Isolepis cernua*) – Native to North America. This grass is grown as an annual in our climate. It fits well in small spaces and has an unusual appearance with its fine texture and low mounding habit. Perfect for a container garden.

Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) – Native to North America and North Carolina. Has nice plumes in late summer through the fall. Looks good throughout the season. Some varieties such as 'Dallas Blue' will have a blue -green foliage. Will grow in full sun or part shade and will get up to 5 feet tall. Good for wildlife.

Watch out for the Cicada-Killer!

By Wendi Hartup, Natural Resources Extension ***Agent***

It's that time of year when you'll see large numbers of huge Cicada-Killer Wasps (nearly 2 inches) skimming around your yard, shrubs and trees. Many people are afraid of wasps in general and really large wasps, like Cicada-Killers, can be threatening. These wasps are erratic fliers that do not seem to notice humans are different than trees. If you watch them long enough you may see a male clumsily slam into the side of building.

Cicada-Killers are most commonly confused with European hornets. European hornets are yellowish-orange colored insects almost an inch long, build large paper nests, are attracted to lights, and tend to occur in natural areas. Cicada-Killers are harmless and you'll see the males (cannot sting) zooming around looking for a mate. A male stinger is a modified ovipositor (egg-laying organ); no male ants, bees, or wasps can sting. To be stung by a female Cicada-Killer you need to either step barefoot on her or grab her with bare hands.

Cicada-Killers are present in the eastern U.S. from July - September. Cicada-Killers, as their name implies, seek out cicadas. Cicadas damage deciduous trees (ex. maple, oak, birch) by laying eggs under the soft bark of new branch growth. Young cicadas drop to the ground, burrow, and spend the next couple years feeding on roots. Currently human attempts to control cicadas have not been practical or effective.

The Cicada-Killer males live for two weeks or so of intense patrolling, fighting and mating and then they die. Females live about four weeks, but they work even harder than the males, digging many burrows and hunting. In a typical season 100 female Cicada-Killers will clear over 16,000 cicadas from the surrounding area.

Cicada-Killer females use their sting to paralyze cicadas to feed and rear their young. A Cicada-Killer grub will hatch from the egg in a few days, feed on the cicada and over-winter underground in a hard cocoon. It will hatch in early to mid July, dig its way to the surface and live above ground for 2-6 weeks; all adults die annually.

After emerging and mating, female wasps spend about two weeks searching for ideal areas to dig their u-shaped mound and burrows. Cicada-Killers choose southeast facing, full sun areas with sparse vegetation, well-drained slopes and large deciduous trees nearby. They prefer sandy soils to loose clay in bare or grass covered banks, berms, hills, raised sidewalks, driveways and patio slabs. Some may nest under shrubs, in planters, window boxes, and flower beds, and occasionally in golf course sand traps. They do not nest in hydric soils.

How do you control them? The most economical control is to whack them with a badminton racket. Secondly you can irrigate the infested area. Try keeping the areas where they dig nests much wetter than usual - fill the burrows with water and wash away the piles of dirt surrounding them. This is a great reason for saving rainwater with a rain barrel.

You can also apply carbaryl (Sevin) or pyrethroids (ex. Advanced Lawn, Bug-B-Gone, Deltaguard, Scimitar, Talstar, Tempo) dust onto each nest entrance. Do not disturb the burrow as the female must walk through the dust to get a good dose. Most likely you will need to repeat treatments for 2-3 weeks if new wasps move into the area. At close range, adults can be killed with a wasp aerosol as they light on foliage or enter the nest burrow. If you do not feel comfortable treating the area, contact a licensed pest control operator. Before using any insecticide, always read the label directions to confirm current listing of pests, and follow safety precautions.

Just remember that if you spray the burrows you will only kill the female, but not necessarily all her offspring since they are walled off in chambers underground. To prevent an infestation in the following year, you will need to dust the burrow early on, before many cicadas have been sequestered.

To help prevent Cicada-Killer nesting: plant dense, tall vegetation; mow your lawn on the highest setting during the nesting period; and in garden beds make sure you have a three-inch layer of hardwood mulch. Finally, time is on your side. If you've tried all these suggestions and cannot get rid of the Cicada-Killers, be patient. The wasps don't live very long, so at most they will be a pest about two months out of the year.

Howard Russell and Jackie Smith
MSU Diagnostic Services

As a size comparison of some of the wasp people have been sending into the lab. Top -cicada killer, Middle - European paper wasp, Bottom - Eastern yellowjacket.

From the Master Gardener Hotline - Insecticides

By Bert Lantz, Master Gardener Volunteer

Each year we receive a number of calls asking what insecticide products we recommend. We are not allowed to name specific brands, but we understand that product selection can be difficult. Just go to one of the big box stores and see the number of products that are on their shelves.

There are hundreds of insects that can attack your plants. However, not all insects are harmful, and you should be careful to apply insecticides only when they are actually needed. It is therefore important to carefully monitor your plants, especially during periods of warm weather and try to identify any insects that are visible. This can sometimes be difficult, but it is helpful to find out what pests are common to your area and problems that are common to specific plants. For instance, if you have any Alberta Spruce shrubs, watch for signs of spider mites which are a common problem for this plant. A common problem for Azaleas is lace bugs. When you see leaves that are discolored or have signs that that they are being chewed, find out what insects may cause the problem on that plant. The internet is a great tool and offers solutions to many plant problems and can be very helpful identifying specific insects.

More and more people are becoming concerned about applying chemicals on their lawns and gardens. Chemicals can be dangerous, and before using any product, you should carefully read the label. In previous articles we have indicated that healthy plants are generally less susceptible to pests and disease and soil structure is the most important factor in raising healthy plants. Start with good soil preparation by adding organic matter and use plants that are resistant to specific problems, use crop rotation and practice good sanitation. If you have to apply an insecticide, consider using products that are considered "Organic". Products such as Neem Oil, Spinosan and Insecticidal soap or ones that contain Bacillus Thuringiensis (BT) are considered organic. Some products contain wording to imply that they are organic, but this is not always the case. If a product is truly organic, you can verify this by going to the Organic Material Review Institute web site www.OMRI.org and entering the product name. If the product is considered organic, it will be listed. There are times when stronger chemicals may be required, but it is good practice to avoid using these products whenever you can.

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