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Mulching Trees and Shrubs *By Craig Mauney, Horticulture Agent*

Mulching trees and shrubs is a good method to reduce landscape maintenance and keep plants healthy. Mulch helps conserve moisture -- 10 to 25 percent reduction in soil moisture loss from evaporation. Mulches help keep the soil well aerated by reducing soil compaction that results when raindrops hit the soil. They also reduce water runoff and soil erosion. Mulches prevent soil and possible fungi from splashing on the foliage -- thus reducing the likelihood of soil-borne diseases. They help maintain a more uniform soil temperature (warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer) and promote the growth of soil microorganisms and worms.

Mulches eliminate mowing around trees and shrubs and provide a physical barrier that prevents damage from lawn mowers and weed trimmers. A 2- to 4-inch layer (after settling) is adequate to prevent most weed seeds from germinating. Mulch should be applied to a weed-free soil surface. Simply covering perennial weeds such as Bermuda grass or nutsedge will not prevent their growth.

The mulched area should include as much of the root zone as possible. For beds, mulch the entire area. For individual plants, such as trees, the mulched area should extend at least 3 to 6 feet out from the base of the plant. It is advisable to pull the mulch 1 to 2 inches from the base of plants to prevent bark decay.

Mulch depth depends on the type of material used and the drainage and moisture holding capacity of the soil. Sandy

soils dry out quickly and often benefit from a slightly deeper mulch layer (3 to 4 inches). A site that stays moist may not benefit from mulching at all. Mulch can be applied any time of the year. However, the best time to mulch is fall and late spring after the soil has warmed. Early spring application will delay soil warming and possibly plant growth.



Above: When mulch is pushed up along the sides of a tree trunk, it is referred to as “volcano mulching”. Some people think this is attractive and mistakenly believe it helps trees establish themselves after being planted.

Below: Trees benefit more from this kind of extensive mulching. You’re not doing them any favors by piling it higher and deeper.



American Persimmons *by Derek Morris, Horticulture Technician*



The American persimmon is a native tree that can be found growing wild in all 100 North Carolina counties. It is native from Florida to New York and

westward to Kansas and Texas. It is an opportunistic tree, popping up along fence and hedgerows throughout the south. It is in the Ebony family and has very hard dense wood that was once prized for shuttles and golf clubs. The early settlers and native Indians made use of its fruits that ripen in the fall for puddings and other sweetmeats. American Indians commonly dried persimmon pulp into loaves for winter consumption.

For those in the know, the fruits are still highly prized today. Persimmon fruits, which must be gathered from the ground when ripe, are very sweet and have a spicy rich flavor. They should never be picked from the tree as the burnt orange fruits are full of tannins that make them very astringent until fully ripe. Once ripe they will drop to the ground. Not only do humans find the fruit quite tasty but persimmons are loved by most all wildlife including deer, fox, opossum, and raccoon. Persimmon trees are perfect planted in a wildlife garden.

The tree, which can grow up to 70 foot but is much more

likely seen between 30 and 40 foot, is deciduous and its leaves turn a pretty golden yellow or purplish red before dropping. The trees are either male or female. Male trees generally do not produce fruit but produce the necessary pollen needed for female trees to fruit. Persimmon blossoms, which are small and whitish-yellow, are not very showy but are highly sought after by bees. A tree in full bloom will be humming with bee activity.

Persimmon grows and fruits best in full sun but will also grow in partly shaded areas. The trees have attractive bluish green leaves during the summer and the bark is also an attractive feature, having scaly squared blocks that resemble an alligator's hide. Many varieties have been selected through the years for fruit quality. Most of the selections have been found growing in the wild. 'Early golden' was selected in the late 1800's and has been grown and propagated ever since. It still ranks as one of the best for flavor. Other varieties that are quite good are 'yates', 'ruby', and 'dollywood'. Most of the named varieties which are grafted will produce fruit without a male tree nearby though this is not always the case.

As one might expect, persimmons are not too fussy about growing conditions and are very adaptable to different soil conditions. They are very drought tolerant once established and there are very few insect or disease problems. Persimmon is one of the best native trees that could be utilized in many landscape situations. There are even selected male varieties such as 'loverboy' or 'william' if one does not want a fruiting specimen.

COLFAX



PERSIMMON
FESTIVAL

Admission fee: \$5 per person at the gates.
(Children under age 12 and parking are free.)

Inclement weather date:
November 10, 2012.
Please do NOT bring:
pets, coolers, alcohol.

Fifth Annual Persimmon Festival

Will be held at Historic Stafford Farm
558 North Bunker Hill Road, Oak Ridge NC 27310

Saturday, November 3, 2012

10:00 am to 4:00 pm

- Persimmon products, including persimmon pudding
- Persimmon history
- Lots of food and music
- Levering Orchard apples
- Stonefield Cellars wine
- Blacksmith/Woodworker/Chainsaw Artist/Flintnapper
- Arts & crafts tents
- Car, tractor show
- Apple cider
- Nature walk to the Big Tree
- Wagon rides
- Children's area w/vintage games

For More Information, please go to: www.colfaxpersimmonfest.com or call Gene Stafford, organizer at 336-682-5328.

Organizing Your Community Garden *by Mary Jac Brennan, Extension Agent, Community Gardens*

We have much to be proud of in Forsyth County. There are over 90 active community gardens which grew 104,000 pounds of fresh produce this summer! Twenty thousand pounds of that harvest was donated to people in need. Community gardens can be a valid solution to some of Forsyth County's food insecurity.

How have these gardens been so successful? In part, it is the dedicated garden champions which keep the groups working together. All gardens need a committed leader who is passionate and knowledgeable about gardening. But a community is more than one person. A healthy community garden organization has used organizing tools to establish a social environment which fosters individual involvement. Although all of our community gardens are unique, there are common guidelines which lead to successful and sustainable gardens. Even with common features in the gardens and the organizations, each one reflects the personality of the garden group. It is important to have established guidelines for gardeners to follow, but it is equally important to 'leave room' for creative input from the garden group. Adaptation to change is very important to the success of a community garden organization. Establishing some processes which support adaptation in your garden's organization is a good idea.

The idea of a community garden may start with an individual, a small group in a faith community, agency, or workplace, or even a family. The originator of the concept must cultivate what is called a 'core' group of people to meet and start the planning process for the community garden. By sharing the idea with others through direct contact, or in a newsletter, social media outlet, or by flyers, interested people will be identified. A key to a community garden's long term success is empowering people to be a part of the garden's mission, whether it is to donate produce to a pantry or to increase food access to individuals. Developing your community garden organization through the community organizing process has proved to be a successful strategy.



Successfully organized community gardens are based on the following core beliefs of community organizing:

- People are intelligent and capable and want to do the right thing.
- Groups can make better decisions than any one person can make alone.
- Everyone's opinion is important and is of equal value, regardless of rank or position.
- People are more committed to the ideas and plans that they have helped to create.
- People can act responsibly in assuming true accountability for their decisions.
- Groups can manage their own conflicts, behaviors, and relationships if they have the right tools, training, and support.
- The community organizing process, if well designed and honestly applied, can be trusted to achieve results.

A program on 'How to Start a Community Garden' will be held on Tuesday, December 4, 2012 from 6:00-8:00pm at the Forsyth County Agriculture Building. For more information contact Mary Jac Brennan at 703-2869 or brennamj@forsyth.cc.

Tips on Applying Weed Killer in the Landscape *By Craig Mauney, Horticulture Agent*

1. Do not apply weed controls on newly seeded areas of the lawn.
2. Do not apply weed controls on windy days.
3. Do not apply weed controls near or at the edge of a waterway.
4. Do not apply weed controls when the temperatures are above 85 degrees F.
5. Do not allow children or pets to play on lawns that have freshly applied weed controls.
6. Wait the time period recommended on the label of the product.

Always follow the directions on the label and use recommended safety equipment.





I'm sure you have heard about the Master Gardeners in Forsyth County. You see them at the fair answering gardening questions and handing out informational booklets. You may have been to a gardening program at your local library where a Master Gardener was giving a lecture. Or maybe you've been to the Arboretum at Tanglewood Park and seen all the beautiful gardens that are maintained solely by Master Gardeners. Ever thought you might want to be one of them and put your gardening knowledge to use in your community and gain more research based knowledge in the process? Then ask yourself the following questions:

Have You Ever:

- ▶ Had a vegetable or flower garden?
- ▶ Renovated a lawn, pruned trees or shrubs?
- ▶ Maintained a home orchard?

Do You Enjoy:

- ▶ Meeting and talking with people?
- ▶ Searching for answers to questions that you or others have?
- ▶ Attending educational classes on a wide range of horticultural topics?
- ▶ Sharing your expertise and time with others?

Do You Have:

- ▶ At least 3 to 4 hours of time per month that you can volunteer to the Forsyth County Center of the NC Cooperative Extension?

If so, becoming a Master Gardener Volunteer may be just right for you! Our application deadline for this program was September 30th, but we still have room for a few more people and will continue to accept application through October 31st or until the program is full. Classes will start in January and run through June, so if you think this program may be for you, we want to hear from you!

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