Household Electronics Recycling Event

Craven County Clean Sweep will sponsor a household electronics recycling event on April 17, 10 AM to 2 PM, here at the Craven County Agricultural Building. Unwanted or unusable electronics items including computer parts and televisions will be accepted at no charge. Call 633-1477 for additional information.

Cold Temperature Damage to Turf

Will we see dead centipedegrass this spring as a result of the exceptionally cold weather of January 2010? One answer is, we always see dead centipedegrass in the spring. Lots of it. Perhaps we’ll see a bit more this year; however, one of the most important factors in cold temperature damage is fluctuation between warm spells and cold spells. So if we don’t have big swings back and forth between now and April, it might turn out to be a normal year for dead patches in April and regrowth by June or July. In an alert posted on NCSU’s Turffiles page (see Winter-Kill Alert! posted at www.turffiles.ncsu.edu), Bert McCarty of Clemson and Grady Miller of NC State provide some clues as to where we might be more likely to see cold damage showing up this spring. For example, prolonged shade produces weaker plants and suppresses soil temperatures. Shaded areas also remain colder for prolonged periods. In addition to shade provided by trees or buildings, northern or northeastern facing slopes receive less sunlight in the winter than in the summer, and are more susceptible to low-temperature stress. The authors also state that poor drainage increases turf susceptibility to low-temperature injury. Unfortunately for homeowners and turf managers, some turf areas that remain reasonably well-drained during the summer months will tend to be wetter during the winter. Excessive foot or dog traffic, parking of cars, construction, and similar activities will not only directly damage turf during cold weather, but will contribute to soil compaction. And soil compaction is an additional problem during the winter as it reduces soil oxygen levels and water infiltration. A survey of your property should provide some insight into where problems are more likely to occur, and whether or not site changes or management practices can minimize cold damage. Two management practices to consider for next year (on centipedegrass in particular) would be to avoid nitrogen applications after the 1rst of August and soil test to make sure potassium levels are adequate.
Weeds!

Another helpful article from Extension Horticulture Specialist Joe Neal:

While the cold of winter keeps us inside where it is warm, weeds are plotting their revenge for all the havoc we laid upon them last year. Seeds lie dormant, waiting to emerge when soils begin to warm. Roots, tubers and rhizomes hide beneath the cold soil surface, insulated and protected from the elements -- ready when mother nature says "go". Winter is the time to plot our own strategies for controlling these pests before they get a chance to establish. Top dress mulch now to prevent summer annual weeds from emerging.

Preemergence herbicides need to be applied before weeds germinate. Research has shown that you really cannot apply your preemergence herbicides too early in the winter. So, go ahead and apply preemergence herbicides to woody landscape beds as soon as weather, soil conditions, and your frozen digits allow. Choosing the right product depends on what ornamentals are in the bed AND what you are planning to plant this spring.

Does the bed contain bulbs and herbaceous perennials? If so, be sure the herbicide you choose is safe on those species. Do you add annual flowers to the bed later in the spring? If so, don't treat with a residual herbicide where you plan to plant within the next 12 weeks.

Are there perennial weeds such as Florida betony or mugwort in the bed? If so, you may want to evaluate the potential for using Casoron. BUT, be cautions. Casoron will kill or injure many ornamental plants including nearly all herbaceous ornamentals. So, make sure your landscape plants are listed on the Casoron label before using this herbicide.

Do you have vetch in the bed? This one can be tough to kill. Glyphosate is only partially effective on vetch. Lontrel can be a more effective choice -- but again, use it with caution as injury can occur from root uptake by sensitive ornamental plants (mainly those in the aster and legume family --- can you say dead red buds?)

Bottom line -- if you are going to use a herbicide in your landscape beds this winter, first be sure it is safe on your ornamentals -- even those perennials that are hidden below the mulch.

Landscape

Pansies not blooming? This is very much dependent on temperature as we move through the heart of winter. When our mornings start out in the 20’s and only move to somewhere in the high 30’s or so during the day, neither your
pansies nor violas are going to do very much. However, as I write this on 1/14, we’re looking at daytime highs in the 50’s or potentially the low 60’s by the weekend. That’s more like it for pansies. Two All America Selections (AAS) which caught my attention in a recent e-mail are ‘Double Zahara Cherry’ and ‘Double Zahara Fire’ zinnias. Plants mature at about 12 inches, produce bright and vivid colors, and have good resistance to leaf spot and powdery mildew.

Definitely worth watching for in 2010. For another “new” group of bedding plants to consider, I continue to be fascinated with the various *Cuphea* species, including *C. ignea* (cigar plant – scarlet flowers), *C. llavea* (red cuphea) and *C. micropetala* (tall cigar plant - red). The colors are brilliant, the flowers and foliage are unique and interesting, and the plants seem to thrive in our hot summers with little or no pest problems. They are becoming easier to find in the trade, so look for them this spring. These are considered annuals, but I and at least one of our Master Gardener volunteers have noticed individual plants coming back for a second year or more. As a followup to my listing of native tree suggestions last time, I discovered that black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*) – a Craven County native I didn’t include in that short list – was selected as the Society of Municipal Arborists’ 2008 Tree of the Year. Black gum is not a tree we tend to find locally in garden centers, but because it is common and widely distributed across the area, it frequently shows up in new landscapes as one of the trees retained during construction. Attributes include a picturesque branching habit, dark green foliage, excellent red fall color (sometimes including yellow to orange on the same tree), and attractive blue drupes (fruit). If you’re planting one into the landscape, moist to wet sites will probably work better than dry, sandy soils in full sun. Black gum is susceptible to a very cosmetic leaf spot, but from any distance at all this is not very noticeable and should be considered a minor issue at most. Looking for sources of native trees? Visit www.dfr.state.nc.us This is the website for the NC Division of Forest Resources. Click on “Urban & Community Forestry”, and on that page look for “Nurseries Selling Native Trees”.

I recently asked Master Gardener Volunteer Joe Gawek, who has managed the Eastern NC Rose Society’s demonstration rose garden here at the Agricultural Building for many years, to provide suggestions for low maintenance roses for Eastern NC landscapes. By now, we’re all familiar with the Knock Out® series. Joe suggests three additional selections to consider. ‘Home Run’ is a red rose with excellent disease resistance. ‘Pretty Lady’ has creamy white flowers. Finally, ‘Lady Elsie May’ produces pink flowers all season long. Consider adding these varieties to your landscape this spring if you love roses but would like to minimize disease control challenges. Thanks for the advice, Joe! Late February/early March is prime time for pruning woody landscape plants, grape vines, fruit trees, etc. However, if the plant in question is producing fruit or showy flowers early in the season – and therefore on last year’s wood – delay pruning until you’ve enjoyed the fruit or flowers. As examples, azaleas are clearly flowering on last year’s wood; crapemyrtles on current year’s growth.
Now is a good time for soil testing; remember that paper reports are no longer routinely mailed out, and you'll need to go online to view your report. Now is also a good time to remulch areas where the mulch layer has become thin, to discourage weed germination and development.

Visit [http://tinyurl.com/ncgardens](http://tinyurl.com/ncgardens) to view the Extension Gardener newsletter.

**Turf**

As noted many times in newsletters past, greenup is a sensitive period for centipedegrass. Nitrogen fertilizer applied during greenup and shortly thereafter will succeed primarily in encouraging weed growth, pushing turf shoot growth at the expense or root regeneration, and making the lawn more susceptible to large patch disease and cold temperature damage. Not to mention the fact that the lawn will be very inefficient in actually taking up nitrogen that time of year – resulting in more nitrogen lost to the environment. Wait at least two to three weeks following full greenup before fertilizing warm season turf. For centipedegrass, consider waiting until late May or early June.

Herbicides applied during the greenup period can also cause damage, in particular to centipedegrass lawns. Herbicides containing imazaquin can delay greenup if applied in February. Are we paying close attention to the environmental warnings on our pesticide labels? Here’s an interesting excerpt from one particular insecticide used for fire ants and other pests: “Do not apply within 15 feet of bodies of fresh water; lakes, reservoirs, rivers, permanent streams, marshes, natural ponds, and commercial fish ponds. A 15 feet buffer of uniform groundcover must exist between application zone and bodies of freshwater (uniform ground cover is defined as land which supports vegetation of greater than 2 inches throughout).

**Fruits and Vegetables**

For residents with limited space outdoors, some vegetable production can still be attained by use of containers or trellises (vertical gardening). If a trellis on the back deck is about all you have to work with, watermelons are not necessarily out of the picture. Consider the 2010 AAS watermelon hybrid ‘Shiny Boy’. It’s considered to be an excellent choice for vertical gardens. If you’re interested in growing some home garden potatoes, it’s time to get moving. According to Master Gardener volunteer Mike Price, seed potatoes are showing up in the stores, and February is an excellent time to plant. Varieties to consider, and which are most likely to be found locally, include Red Pontiac (large grower, space seed pieces 12” apart), Red LaSoda, Kennebec (white, later maturing, good producer), and Yukon Gold (yellow flesh – not as productive as some, but very good eating). Mike suggests that you have one or preferably two eyes to each piece you plant. After cutting, let the pieces dry out until they begin to cork, before planting. You can dust with wettable sulfur to speed up the drying, discourage pest damage, and hopefully lower the soil pH a bit right around the
seed piece once it’s in the soil – which can help to reduce the occurrence of potato scab disease. Consider setting the pieces an inch or two deep in the soil and covering with 4-5 inches of mulch. Back to the issue of soil pH: Make sure you’re testing the garden soil every 2-3 years, to avoid problems such as excessive accumulation of phosphorus and to monitor soil pH. If you’ve been adding wood ash to the garden this winter, be advised that over time the resultant increase in soil pH may get beyond what’s optimal for your crops. Soils with a pH of 7.0 or above, for example, should not receive additional wood ash. Soil pH should decline over time, and you can get back to it then. A recent note from Kansas State University states that wood ash applications work best when soil levels of phosphorus and potassium are low, and suggests adding no more than five pounds of wood ash per 1,000 square feet annually.

Now is also a good time to plant asparagus. E-mail tom_glasgow@ncsu.edu for details on planting and growing asparagus.

**Upcoming Events**

February 13: N.C. Pecan Growers Association’s meeting, workshop and orchard tour, Lenoir County Center, 1791 Highway 11/55 in Kinston. The event is open to anyone involved, or interested, in pecan farming. Cost is $15, and includes lunch. Registration begins at 8 a.m. For more info, contact Laurie Wood, NCDA&CS marketing specialist, at (910) 532-4208 or e-mail at laurie.wood@ncagr.gov, or Bill Bunn, NCPGA president, at (919) 815-5764 or e-mail at carya@intrex.net.

February 16: Landscape Pruning Workshop, 1 PM – 3 PM, Craven County Agricultural Building. Free and open to the public. This is an additional date to the usual third-Saturday program. Please call ahead at 633-1477 to register.

February 20: Landscape Pruning Workshop, 10 AM – noon, Craven County Agricultural Building. Free and open to the public. Please call ahead at 633-1477 to register, due to large turnouts the past few years.

February 25-26: Getting Started in the Greenhouse Business School, Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center, Blackstone, VA. Contact Joyce Latimer at (540) 231-7906 or e-mail jlatime@vt.edu for information.

March 6: Rose pruning demonstration, presented by the Eastern NC Rose Society. 10 AM in their demonstration garden located on the grounds of the Craven County Agricultural Building. Call 633-1477 for additional information.

April 17: Household Electronics Recycling, parking lot of the Craven County Agricultural Building, 10 AM to 2 PM. Unwanted or unusable electronics items including televisions will be accepted at no charge. Call 633-1477 for information.
May 27-28: NCSU 10th Annual Vermiculture Conference, Durham. This is the only conference about earthworm farming and mid-to-large-scale vermicomposting held in the United States. Visit www.bae.ncsu.edu/workshops/worm-conference

**Beekeepers** meet the third Tuesday evening of each month at 7:30 PM at the Craven County Agricultural Building, with the exception of November and December. Everyone interested in bees or beekeeping is welcome to attend.

**The Eastern NC Rose Society** meets the first Saturday of each month at 10 AM, also at the Agricultural Building. If you have a strong interest in roses, stop by for one of their meetings and maybe consider becoming a member. Be sure to visit their demonstration garden on the grounds of the Agricultural Building.

*Any reference to trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by NC Cooperative Extension is implied. Use pesticides safely. Read and follow all label directions.*