

Summer 2022

The Garden Path

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All the Buzz

Bea Leach

Another spring has arrived in the Memorial Garden at the Vance County Regional Farmers Market. Everything looks so fresh and new. One area of the garden that has needed much attention is the herb trough, which is a large galvanized tub planted with various herb plants. The few herbs in the trough have been spindly and sparse. Our herb trough contains perennials of tarragon, thyme, and lavender. We spruced things up a bit by adding decorative white pebbles on top of the soil.

Most herbs originated in the Mediterranean and like hot, dry weather. They don't like a lot of water and do best without fertilizers. Keeping that in mind, a layer of small rocks was added to the top of the herb trough to help with drainage and elevate the temperature. We added marjoram, lemon verbena and gold lemon thyme.

Another plant we added to the herb bed was borage. Borage

originated in Syria but has become naturalized in Europe and parts of North America and Australia. It is a prickly, bushy herb that grows to two feet and produces star shaped blue flowers that droop. These flowers will bloom from May to September and will be visited by many bees. Borage is an annual but it produces black seeds that will self-sow.

Borage was described by the sixteenth century herbalist, Gerard, as being "for the comfort of the heart" and to "make the mind glad". It's not often added to foods as a seasoning, as its prickly leaves are a discouragement to eating. But the leaves and flowers have a delicate cucumber taste. Historically, borage leaves were steeped to make a tea that was then fortified with spirits to make punch. For that reason, Pliny, a first century Roman said, "it maketh a man merry and joyfull". Charles



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Dickens loved a punch with sherry and brandy and the borage flowers and shared the recipe with American friends while visiting.

It will be interesting to watch this plant as it grows throughout the summer.

Until next time...

The Garden Tyro

By Eileen Novak

You know, I am about fed up with the entomological Insect kingdom declaring war on me!

If it's not fire ants in the strawberry bed, it's wasps building nests in the cornstalks or bees being offended by the fact that I am weeding. And each time one of these insects delivers a stinging rebuke (and I mean STINGING) whatever appendage it stings does its level best to swell up and itch FOREVER.

Well, maybe not forever. Just an irritatingly long time.

The insects have been doing this to me for YEARS, it seems. As I child I frequently ran barefoot through the grass and occasionally stepped on a honeybee trying to garner nectar from the clover in the lawn. Then one time, hiking in Maine, I stepped ON a log instead of stepping OVER the log and found out where Yellowjacket wasps build nests. Painfully. 17 stings worth. Since that episode, I have reacted severely to the slightest insectoid incursion. Mosquito bites swell up to the size of half-dollar coins. No-see-ums (gnats) find me particularly delicious and every taste puffs up.

I just can't get away from the insect kingdom while I garden and I find this fact lamentable. I have tried most of the advertised tricks – Spraying myself with Listerine original flavor, using a bath oil product, wearing a citronella wristband GUARANTEED to keep the bugs at bay. Nothing works for me.

The only thing that might work is if I volunteer for a space station mission and garden hydroponically in space. I'll bet the bugs wouldn't find me up there! I wonder what NASA says about 70-year old civilian gardeners...

Extension Agent note: John Glenn flew on the Space Shuttle at the age of 77. William Shatner flew on the Blue Origins spacecraft at the age of 90. NASA has a research project that is growing vegetables on the International Space Station. Eileen, you have my unqualified support.



Introducing WEDGE

Juel Duke

Extension Master Gardener volunteers from the Vance Warren chapter (of which I am a member) have undertaken a long-term expansion of the demonstration gardens at the NC Cooperative Extension office for Warren County, located at 158 Rafters Ln., Warrenton, NC. We chose the acronym WEDGE to name the entire group of gardens. WEDGE stands for the



Warren Extension Demonstration Garden Experience. An existing raised bed along the sidewalk that leads to the front door of the office was first rejuvenated as a bed to attract pollinators. The next year, a bed dedicated to native ornamental grasses was added nearby as a reminder that grasses are an important part of an ecosystem. Nearby, a small elevated raised bed shows visitors that vegetables can be raised in a small space and nearly year round here. In late 2020, the volunteers started an ambitious project: the creation of a 21 foot diameter herb wheel

that is aligned with the compass. Construction was complete in Fall 2021 and some plants were added. This spring we are replacing annuals and adding more herbs that relate to the different themes that are assigned to different sections of the wheel that mimics an old fashioned wagon wheel, complete with a large elevated rosemary plant in the hub. A grand opening for the public to learn more about this garden will, hopefully, take place later this year.



The Giving Tree

Kay Nutt



Outside our east bedroom grows a sugar maple, *Acer saccharum* that turns a lovely yellow in fall. It's a beauty that I call my giving tree. I planted it between the bedroom and bath windows for summer morning shade not losing the view of our side yard. It was planted several years after we had built the house and now is a good 15 + years old. Unfortunately, the second year after planting, at the end of winter we experienced below freezing weather for more than a week and the plant was killed back to the ground. When new growth was sent up, we had two trunks. This does not make for a strong tree, but we kept the double trunk.

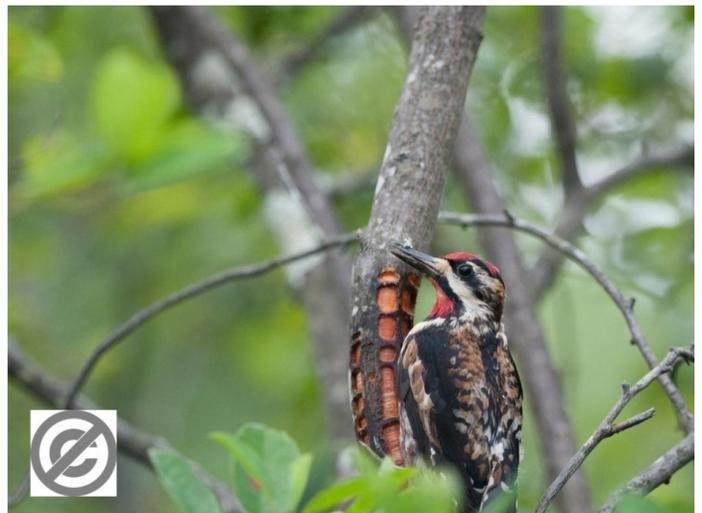
Each summer the tree hosts several bird nests, usually from our many Cardinals. These rather poorly constructed twig nests are discovered after the leaves fall from the tree. It is amazing how the Cardinals manage

to raise young in this loose nest.

Late fall to early winter this tree serves as a landing for birds before and after they visit my many feeders around the corner of the house.

Not much happens until January, when I look out to see the Yellow Bellied Sapsucker, (*Sphyrapicus variu*), who has returned after the summer at the breeding ground of the northern US and Canada. These birds get their name from the most unusual way they supplement their diet.

Looking at my maple, I see bands of horizontal small holes. If you look closer, you see each hole is elongated horizontally and then enlarged vertically so the birds can sip more sap. These are neat rows of sap wells that will start running when the sun hits the bark on warmer days. Insects



even get trapped in the sap and add some needed protein to the bird's diet. Reading in the Cornell Lab, Living Bird Magazine a sapsucker licks up sap and trapped insects that are caught in the sap with a specialized brush-tipped tongue. The sapsucker is joined in the sipping by Chickadees, Cardinals, Carolina Wrens, Song and Field Sparrows, Tufted Titmice, Ruby Crowned Kinglets and the Mockingbird.

I have an apple tree growing on the other side of the house near the raised bed garden that also shows neat rows of Sapsucker holes. I don't sit out in the garden during the winter and have not seen the birds working the holes or sipping sap.

If you have maple or apple trees in your garden check for the Sapsucker holes. These birds are also fond of pecking holes in Pecan, other fruit trees, Elm, Birch, Holly and even pine.

You too may have a giving tree right in your yard.

Summer Checklist of Things to do in the Garden

By Mary Jane Bosworth

June

- There is still time to set out summer bedding plants. Fill in empty spots with bits of color. Water well at this time of year.
- Remove spent blooms from annuals which will keep them blooming profusely. If you hate deadheading, plant annuals that drop their dead blooms, like ageratum, cleome, gomphrena, impatiens, pentas, narrowleaf zinnia.
- Stake tall flowering plants.
- Divide and replant spring flowering bulbs.
- Fertilize plants after the first round of blooms for a boost.
- Pinch back herbs to prevent flowering. This also gives them a bushier appearance.
- Set out tomato plants in late June for harvest in the fall.
- Late June and July are the times for rooting semi-hardwood cuttings of your favorite shrubs.
- Pruning of spring flowering shrubs should be done immediately after they bloom.
- Snap off the growing tips of Chrysanthemums for them to branch and bloom more profusely.

July

- Take it easy in the heat and work in the early morning or the evening.
- Continue to deadhead blooms.
- Use insecticidal soap to aphid, spider mites and lacebugs.
- Hydrangea and forsythia can be propagated by bending stems to the ground and covering them with soil. This works with rhododendron and figs as well.
- Keep gardens watered in dry spells.
- Impatiens, petunia and marigolds tend to get leggy in the heat. Pinch them back, one third at a time, to help them become bushier and produce more flowers. The same goes for coleus.
- Cleomes have few flowering stalks. Before they bloom, snip off a few inches from the top and continue doing this to each branch as it develops several more times for a plant that will be covered with flowers.
- Sow pumpkins for Halloween.

August

- Container plants are stressed this time of the year and benefit from being moved to partially shaded areas. Water pots daily.
- Plant your fall garden of carrots, lettuce, spinach, kale and set out transplants of cabbage, broccoli and squash.
- Remember to thoroughly soak shrubs when watering to encourage deep root growth.
- August is a good time to transplant iris and daylily.
- Pull out plants that have stopped producing including bush beans, cucumbers and summer squash.
- Trim odd seed heads of basil so the plants will spend their energy on flavorful foliage.
- Leave 3" of stem when you harvest winter squash or pumpkin as we will keep longer.

The New Naturalism, Review of the class

Juel Duke



Do you like learning new ways to think about subjects that you have studied for years? If so, you may want to read the book *The New Naturalism* by Kelly D. Norris. Rewilding, as some authors call it, may be the next big new trend in landscape gardening. Just as many more people are embracing the need for growing plants native to your area, along comes a related concept. This concept, called The New Naturalism by Norris, takes plants out of the familiar garden bed and into a recreation of how plant communities would have functioned and looked in previous times. The goal is to create a landscape that is resilient and thrives with minimal help, once the initial and intense work is complete.

I learned about this concept by reading the book, and also through an on-line course taught by Norris, offered through the J.C. Raulston Arboretum.

Just three of the principles presented are

1. An extremely low level of disturbance to the soil, so there's no tilling.
2. Very dense planting. One plant per square foot on average is the general rule. The mature size of plants is generally disregarded. After all, plants do overlap in the wild.
3. Increased fertility reduces overall plant diversity, a fact that has been repeatedly proven by solid research. Very low, or no added fertility therefore gives the greatest abundance of species which leads to higher resiliency.

Having a resilient landscape that changes over time but remains full and diverse is the ultimate goal.

There is so much to this concept that it can be overwhelming in the amount of information that you can find to help you in a similar project. One tool that is vital to use and understand is NatureServe (<https://explorer.natureserve.org/>). Readers of Doug Tallamy are likely familiar with the site as it is the recommended source for finding the most important pollinator plants in your zip code. Norris, however, makes extensive use of plant lists that are for broader concepts such as “coastal plain” or “high desert” region

Through a complex process, combined with numerous resources, you create a list of plants that would be found in the subject region. Then plants are divided into a “layered typology” planting scheme that consists of three layers.

1. The Matrix is the ground level and will have the highest percentage (approx 50%) of plant species with the goal of needing no mulch to help with water retention and weed suppression. You’ll likely want to use plugs (i.e. small transplants) for this part and it’s the last part that gets planted.
2. The Structure layer is the tallest and may already exist as a backdrop of tall trees. No more than 10% of the species would be in the Structure.
3. The middle layer, called the Vignette, is where you place the plants that you want to draw the eye around the landscape. This layer would have less than 40% of the species.

This is just a very simple overview of the broad concept and the process. I’ll leave you with one idea and one plant to think about. Some, in fact many, of the plants that we think of as long-lived herbaceous perennials are actually short lived. They appear long-lived because they are always present. However, the original plants may only live 3 or 4 years but easily seed in or slowly spread by runners so you don’t notice that the original plant no longer exists. Two examples are *Rudbeckia hirta* and *Echinacea purpurea*. One plant to add to your landscape is your local species of *Packera*. These ragworts, which were formerly in the *Senecio* genus, make outstanding plants for the “matrix” layer. There’s even an evergreen ragwort, *Packera aurea*.

I have a half-inch thick stack of notes and printed handouts, though there were many more pages that I read but didn’t print. Add 300+ screen capture pages and you get an idea of the amount of information given in this class. Now I know that it was aimed at professionals but I certainly enjoyed it and got my money's worth!

Frankly, two months later, I’m still digesting all that Norris presented in this six week course offered through the J. C. Raulston Arboretum. The course was more of a workbook-type guide than a simple review of the book. A book that I’m still reading!

Mr. Norris will be a speaker at the upcoming Southeastern Plant Symposium held by the J. C. Raulston Arboretum. You will find more information at <https://jcra.ncsu.edu/events/details.php?ID=2344>. I highly recommend him as both a great presenter and a garden visionary, though he is quick to point out that he is neither the first nor the only garden writer and landscaper to propose a return to resilient landscapes.

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