

Winter 2022

The Garden Path

Published by the Vance/Warren
Extension Master Gardenersm Volunteers

NC STATE EXTENSION

Master Gardener | Vance-Warren

All the Buzz

Bea Leach

The colors of fall have been fabulous this season. Vibrant reds, oranges, yellows and pink scattered among the dark evergreen trees. Pink is not a color you expect to see in fall, but I anticipate it every year with the blooming of my *Camellia sasanqua*.



I am from the Midwest and camellias are not a familiar flowering shrub as they are best grown in hardiness zones 7-9. After moving to North Carolina, I discovered this beautiful shrub in my yard and it was love at first bloom. *Camellia sasanqua* makes a great understory tree as it likes some shade but will tolerate full sun. It does well in most soil types but likes acid and good drainage. The flowers of the sasanqua which range from white to pink to red are smaller than those of its cousin, *Camellia japonica*, but sasanqua boasts many more blooms. She blooms in the late summer to early fall.

A fun fact – Another cousin to sasanqua and japonica is *Camellia sinensis* which is used to make tea.

Another shrub in the landscape that makes me happy is the *Cephalanthus occidentalis*, Buttonbush. Buttonbush is a native shrub in Eastern Canada and the United States. It grows well in all three regions of North Carolina. Buttonbush can grow tall but usually no more

than about twelve feet high. This is the perfect shrub if you have a wet area in your landscape as Buttonbush loves wet feet. It thrives along streams, lakes and ponds.

The flowers of Buttonbush attract many different pollinators and birds. Their unusual flowers are made up of clusters of small flowers that look like a pincushion or a button. Visit the North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox for a great picture of the flower (link in article below). My garden does not have a wet area. I have managed to keep my buttonbush happy with a place that receives water runoff from our roof. It is also mulched heavily with cypress bark.

I am hoping you are one of those people that allow your gardens to remain “messy” throughout the winter. That mess provides great cover for insects and their larvae. Until next time...



ABOUT BUTTONBUSH SEED HEADS

By Juel Duke

Buttonbush, *Cephalanthis occidentalis*, is a plant that deserves a place in any garden that plans to attract wildlife. I have started it from seed and now grow it in a pot the size of a half whiskey barrel. Numerous drainage holes are drilled about 5" from the bottom allowing the plant to have the wet feet that it likes. It does adapt to less-than-optimal conditions. I've included a photo of a seed head, seeds and a seed head where you can see how the seeds are arranged. It is very common along the banks of John H. Kerr Dam and Reservoir in Warren and Vance counties.

“Wildlife Value: Flowers are attractive to hummingbirds, butterflies including eastern tiger swallowtails, and bees. Songbirds and waterfowl eat seeds. This plant provides nectar for pollinators.” (<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/cephalanthus-occidentalis/>, accessed December 1, 2022)



Recent Pics from the WEDGE Garden

(Warren Extension Demonstration Garden Experience)

Juel Duke



Swallowtail caterpillars on parsley.

Saffron crocus blooming in the Herb Wheel



Green lynx spider with spiderlings near the nest.



Checklist for December, January and February

Mary Jane Bosworth

December

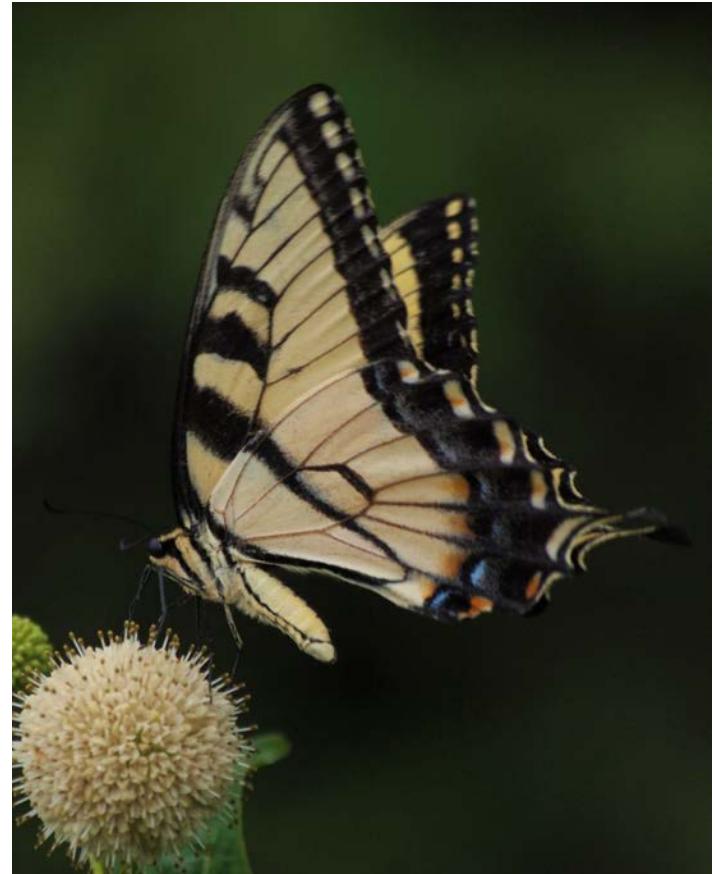
- Trees and shrubs may still be planted this month. Remember to water them throughout the winter during dry spells.
- Dig and transplant small shrubs.
- Now is the time to sow poppy seeds.
- Start onion seed indoors.
- Spend some time with garden catalogs creating a gift giving (and getting!) wish list.
- Fertilize cool season grasses during the winter months.
- Winter applications of lime are beneficial to spring gardens since lime takes a long time to react with the soil. Before doing this, make sure you take a soil sample and have it analyzed to see if lime is needed.
- Add your raked leaves to your compost bin for good compost in the spring.
- There is still time to plant spring blooming bulbs.
- Cut back Sedum, Mexican Bush Sage, Fall Asters and Garden mums within a few inches of the crown.
- Add colorful, cold hardy annuals to your garden for color this winter.
- Weed out the “weed” trees and shrubs in wooded areas while they are easily removed and before they compete for light and nutrients with desirable plants.

January

- Keep your garden well mulched to keep garden temperatures even and protect roots.
- Soak pea seeds overnight and plant directly into the garden. Start them under a row cover but once they are up, they no longer need covering.
- Check bulbs in storage such as Dahlia tubers and gladiolus. If any are rotted, throw them out.
- Spray roses this month with lime-sulfer to control insects and diseases. As with any pesticide, read the instructions carefully, and follow them!
- Toward the end of the month, you can plant broccoli seeds indoors, under lights, for transplanting in March.
- Lettuce, spinach, greens and chard may be planted under row covers, a short row every 2 weeks.

February

- Mulch, water and protect your garden. The mulch helps keep the soil temperatures even.
 - Damage done by hungry critters is not easy to prevent. There are many commercial repellents available. Read labels carefully before applying.
 - Keep ahead of winter weeds by pulling them while they are still young.
 - Take action against invasives. Remove and root out Japanese honeysuckle and English ivy (note that hand removal is impractical for large infestation).
 - If you have a compost bin...shake it up.
 - Fertilize spring flowering bulbs when 1" of growth is seen.
 - Start seeds indoors, either in a sunny window or under grow lights, keeping lights close to the top of the seedlings and raising the lights as they grow.
 - Anxious to get out in the garden, then this is the time to trim and prune. Most trees and ornamentals prefer to be shaped at this time of year. Remove diseased and dead limbs. Shape, keeping in mind that there will be growth in the spring. Do not shear...meaning cutting all branches to one length; but instead, cut branches at various lengths for a natural look.
 - Remember, in your enthusiasm to trim, that you must not cut any spring flowering plants that bloom on last year's wood, such as azaleas, rhododendrons, forsythia, spirea, flowering quince, pieris and others.
 - Ornamental grasses should be cut back before new growth appears.
 - Clean up garden debris.
 - Delay planting warm season grasses until the daytime temperature stays consistently above 60 degrees.
 - **Plan for warmer months by spending time with gardening books and seed catalogs.**
- Get new ideas and purchase something that will make you happy.**



Swallowtail butterfly on Buttonbush blossom.
Photo by Paul McKenzie, all rights reserved

A Different Bumblebee

Juel Duke

In September of 2022, I spotted a bumblebee that wasn't quite what I'm used to seeing. It was feeding on the blooms of the New England Aster, *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*, at my house. It was notably more evenly yellow on the abdomen. Based on an image search via Google, I believe it to be the aptly named Yellow Bumblebee, *Bombus fervidus*. Although a bee with a wide distribution, it seems that it isn't as common in NC as it once was (https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.106721/Bombus_fervidus, accessed Dec 4, 2022). It's always exciting for me to see a new-to-me creature.

For images of the more common bumble bees in North Carolina see Page 33 of The Bees of North Carolina: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/the-bees-of-north-carolina-identification-guide>.



Do I really need a greenhouse?

Juel Duke

Since the last issue of the Garden Path, I've thought more about my need for something more than a squirrel exclusion structure. For now, I'm going to wait longer for a more traditional greenhouse. The bargain greenhouse has been partially put together and its location is chosen but not cleared. This is because of an unforeseen circumstance and the realization that the cover supplied would mean that I'd need to water the plants inside which would be difficult.

One other factor for me stalling is that I have realized that a traditional greenhouse would be questionable for my current purpose.

That purpose is starting seeds of native plants that can be grown in my area: North Central Piedmont of North Carolina. Some of the seeds are easy to start in ways familiar to most gardeners. I already have indoor spaces designed just for that. However, most of the seeds I have require recreating the situations that the seeds would experience if left in the wild. One of the main conditions needed is exposure to prolonged periods of cold, i.e. cold stratification. A traditional greenhouse, even without a heater, could become too warm to satisfy that requirement. For now, I'm going to use the squirrel-safe spaces I already have to cold stratify those seeds. Yes, I could use my freezer but there's not enough room!

I do plan to finish up and position the bargain greenhouse and use it in the early spring. The other spaces I've mentioned in the previous article will also be used.

I have many seeds, as a result of belonging to several organizations in NC, including the J.C. Raulston Arboretum, <https://jcra.ncsu.edu/>. I'd best get started, too, if I want to have a good chance of having more seedlings than I need come Spring. Wish me luck, please.

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Recommendations for the use of chemicals are provided as a convenience. User is responsible for reading and following all instructions. For more information, contact your local Agricultural Extension Agent.

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