Fall is for Planting

Cool weather and the changing colors of leaves are a good sign that it’s time to plant trees, shrubs, and perennials. Although many people plant in the spring, fall is the best time for getting plants established. Summers are particularly stressful for plants, because of the season’s heat, dryness, and pest problems. Planting in the fall will give your plants a leg up on summer and increase their chances of survival.

Root growth of plants occurs in the spring and fall. Planting in fall, rather than the spring, will provide the plant with two seasons (spring and fall) of root growth before the stress of a hot, dry, pest-laden summer.

Planting trees can be a large investment of both time and money, so make sure you do it right the first time. Here are some things to consider when planting trees in your landscape:

- If planting a container-grown remove the pot and check for circling roots.
- Plant the tree no deeper than the soil surface.
- Make sure that the trunk flare (where the roots spread out from the base of the tree) is visible.
- Remove all twine, wire, strings, and straps to prevent girdling the tree.
- Remove any broken, dead, or crossing branches.
- Mulch to a depth of 2-3” evenly around the base of the tree, but do not let the mulch touch the base of the tree.
- Provide 1” of water per week during the growing season.

If you’d like more information about tree planting, visit www.cals.ncsu.edu/extgardener/tree.pdf or call the Iredell Extension office.

North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service
Iredell County Center
444 Bristol Dr. Statesville, NC 28687
704-873-0507 • http://iredell.ces.ncsu.edu
Covering Cover Crops

For those of you not planting a fall vegetable garden, consider sowing a cover crop. Cover crops are plants that are grown not for their harvest, but for the benefits they provide.

Benefits of cover crops are numerous and include improving tilth, preventing erosion, suppressing weeds, and supplying nutrients. Winter annual cover crops are planted in the fall and allowed to grow over the winter until early spring when they are killed by plowing or an herbicide application. Conservation tillage is a system of gardening in which the cover crop is not plowed under after the herbicide treatment but left on the soil as a mulch.

Legumes are good choices for cover crops, because they are a source of Nitrogen. Plants grown after cover crops benefit from this Nitrogen. Legume cover crops can supply most of the Nitrogen required for summer crops, including corn, pumpkins, and cabbage. Legume cover crops reduces the amount of fertilizer that needs to be applied, therefore saving money.

Crimson and red clover, both of which are planted in September, are good choices for legume cover crops. Clover generates most of its Nitrogen in late April / early May, so it should be allowed to grow until then.

If you have done a soil test, and your soil does not lack Nitrogen, then annual rye may be a good choice.

Cover crops can help build soil, suppress weeds, and control erosion. Consider adding a winter cover crop to the rotation in your garden this winter.
If I had to Choose...

To say that growing quality fruit in our area is challenging is an understatement. Apples get rust diseases. Pears get fireblight. Don’t get me started on peaches. Yet everyone with a quarter acre wants to put out fruit trees.

If it were me, I’d stick to blueberries. Blueberries are easy to grow, have few pest problems, and are easy to preserve. They’re also great on a bowl of cereal.

Blueberries are adapted to our acidic soils and so require less soil preparation before planting. There are three types of blueberries grown for fruit; highbush, rabbiteye, and Southern highbush. Rabbiteye varieties are drought and heat resistant and work best for the Piedmont.

You should get a soil test done before planting and incorporate soil amendments prior to planting. Soil tests are free, and kits can be picked up from your local Extension office.

Planting several varieties of blueberries will ensure a long harvest window. Plantings of more than one variety will result in higher yields than plantings of only one variety.

Blueberry plants have shallow roots, so careful cultivation is required. If plants are mulched, hand-weeding should be all that is needed.

Rabbiteye varieties for the Piedmont

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variety</th>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Climax</td>
<td>Very early</td>
<td>Upright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powderblue</td>
<td>Mid to late</td>
<td>Long season</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premier</td>
<td>Very early</td>
<td>Disease resistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tifblue</td>
<td>Early to mid</td>
<td>Vigorous, productive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ira</td>
<td>Early to mid</td>
<td>Productive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yadkin</td>
<td>Early to mid</td>
<td>Very good flavor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Blueberries are relatively easy to grow are delicious in a bowl of cereal.

Recommendations for the use of any chemicals are included in this publication as a convenience to the reader. The use of brand names and any mention or listing of commercial products or services in this publication does not imply endorsement by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service nor discrimination against similar products or services not mentioned. Individuals who use chemicals are responsible for ensuring that the intended use complies with current regulations and conforms to the product label. Be sure to obtain current information about usage and examine a current product label before applying any chemical. For assistance, contact an agent of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service in your county.
Plant Spotlight
‘Venus’ sweetshrub
(Calycanthus ‘Venus’)

Plant breeders at N.C. State University have been busy re-inventing our native sweetshrub. Thanks to Dr. Tom Ranney, a new white flowered hybrid — called ‘Venus’ Sweetshrub — is available for Carolina gardeners to enjoy.

Like our native deciduous sweetshrub, this plant will grow in sun or partial shade. Due to its hybrid vigor, ‘Venus’ needs room to grow and in moist soil it will reach a height and spread of 5 feet. It produces dozens of ivory-colored flower buds that open almost pure white.

Although sweetshrubs are not generally considered mainstream landscape plants, new hybrids like ‘Venus’ should become increasingly popular with gardeners. Use as a shrub border or as a plant in natural areas. Once you see it in flower you’ll understand why it is a showstopper!

Hardiness Zones: 6 to 8

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How to Tell when that Watermelon is Ripe

One of the most common questions related to harvesting vegetables is, “how do I know when my watermelon is ripe?” The watermelon industry has long sought a scientific way for determining ripeness, but has yet to figure it out.

Many people have heard that the fruit are ripe when it makes a dull sound when thumped. This method may have worked with older varieties, but many of the new varieties make a dull thud only when seriously overripe.

Other methods of testing watermelon ripeness are:
- when the tendril nearest the fruit turns brown
- when the “ground spot” (the spot on the melon where it rests on the ground) turns from white to yellow
- when the rind turns from shiny to dull

Of course, the true test of ripeness is in the taste.

To find the best method of testing for ripeness, harvest several melons that appear to be ripe. Then cut them open and taste them for ripeness. When you taste one that is ripe, note the shine on the rind and the color spot. Use that criteria to determine when the others are ripe.

A brown tendril is one sign that a watermelon is ripe.

Photo University of Nebraska

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To sign up for The Gardener’s Gazette electronic newsletter, send an e-mail to amanda_jo_taylor@ncsu.edu