So You Want to Grow Some Fruit!

Growing fruit seems to be one of the holy grails of home gardeners. Wouldn’t it be great if you could put fresh fruit on the table every morning? I don’t know that every morning is likely. In fact, whether you can grow fruit at all depends largely on how much time and energy you are willing to put into it. One of my mentors says that you can’t achieve real success with fruit if it’s only a hobby; it must be a lifestyle. Perhaps.

For now, we’re going to consider some of the things important to growing fruits in general, and then look at some specifics about one that’s almost a sure bet – the blueberry.

First let’s consider some of the requirements for growing fruit. The first is a suitable location. For now you should take my word for it: just because you have a location doesn’t mean it’s suitable for growing fruit. I’ll tell you a story. But first the location should provide sunlight (full sun all day long is optimal); good soil drainage (you may be able to provide that even if you don’t have it yet); soil capable of retaining nutrients; and air movement.

Sunlight is the engine of fruit production. Energy from the sun is converted into food (carbohydrates) in the leaves. The process is known as photosynthesis. You can forget the formula they tried to teach you in school. But the leaves must be in the sun to provide enough carbohydrates for the plant to actually make fruits. All the sugars, nutrients and flavors in the fruit are derived from photosynthesis in the leaves. You need sun.

Good soil drainage will allow some air into the soil from which plants get oxygen. If your location is in a new development where heavy machinery has compacted the soil, there won’t be enough air. Or if the soil is constantly wet, there is not much air present. To alleviate compaction you’ll need to dig or till the soil to loosen it. Or you can apply a lot of organic material and wait a few years for microorganisms to till it in for you. For water problems, you must provide somewhere for the water to go (preferably downhill). And remember that elevation doesn’t guarantee drainage. A sponge holds water against the pull of gravity, and dense soil can too.
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Soil nutrient capacity can be determined by a soil analysis (available, as I remind you now and then, at no charge from the North Carolina Department of Agriculture). A soil analysis will tell you if you need lime and if so, how much. And it will make recommendations that you can use to develop a fertility program.

And your site should provide air movement. Cold air should be able to drain down hill without being blocked by vegetation, walls, or other barriers. Air drainage reduces injury from late spring frosts. Exposure to air movement is also a good way of avoiding disease problems. Many fruit diseases cannot be cured. So avoiding them is important. Fungal diseases thrive in areas that are dark and damp. Sunlight and air movement are part of integrated pest management (IPM).

I promised a story. There was once a fine citizen who was certain that, if I would just look at his orchard, I could tell him some way to prune or fertilize his trees so that they would make fruit. As we left his house, we walked downhill into a bottom area (frost pocket), under the shade of some pines (insufficient sunlight), to where he had planted about a dozen fruit trees much too close together (poor air movement). We weren’t quite to the low point but he had planted a barrier of Camellias to further restrict air movement. We weren’t quite to the low point but he had planted a barrier of Camellias to further restrict air movement. We weren’t quite to the low point but he had planted a barrier of Camellias to further restrict air movement. We weren’t quite to the low point but he had planted a barrier of Camellias to further restrict air movement. We weren’t quite to the low point but he had planted a barrier of Camellias to further restrict air movement.

As I looked around, my best suggestion was to put his orchard where the house was. He had selected the most productive area for the house and then put his orchard in the only area he had left. It wasn’t an area that was likely to be productive. The best suggestions I could make were to remove about 10 – 20 pines to allow sunlight in and remove about half his fruit trees to provide some limited air movement. I doubt he ever got a bushel of fruit from those trees. If you’re serious about fruit, location may be the most important decision you will make.

What to Grow

If you determine that your location may be productive, the next question is what to grow. A good consideration is something that is likely to thrive in your area. People from Florida seldom try to grow citrus in North Carolina. People from southern California seldom try to grow avocados here. But there’s something about people from somewhere that makes them think they can grow cherries here. Maybe all the cherries they ate (or wished they ate?) as children went to their heads. I don’t know.

I’m not saying it’s impossible to grow cherries here. I have stood under a tree and eaten cherries in Chatham County. But it ain’t natural! If you’re expecting to grow cherries here, you better know what you are doing. You can expect better success from certain pears, apples, figs, blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, or muscadine grapes. If you have some experience you may want to build on it. If you don’t have experience growing fruit, then those listed are among the ones likely to thrive in this area and a good starting place for beginners.

What Variety

For each of the fruits suggested, there are also certain varieties that are more likely to produce success than others. Many of the pear varieties that are readily recognizable are highly susceptible to a disease we call fireblight, which is quite common in our area. To avoid it we grow pears such as Moonglow, Kieffer, or Seckel. Fruits that grow quite well in California or New York don’t necessarily do well in North Carolina.

For each of the fruits that we can grow there are certain varieties and practices that will increase the odds that you will actually harvest fruit. Now, I know that there are exceptions. And many of you are thinking that people have just grown or just picked wild fruit for thousands of years. You are correct. That is the hunter/gatherer stage of agriculture. And if you’re willing to take what you get, as hunter/gatherers must, then it’s OK with me. My suggestions are for those who are not satisfied with that level of production.

For more specifics you may request a copy of Producing Tree Fruit for Home Use (also available on line at http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/ag28.html) and/or Grapes & Berries for the Garden (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumerpubs/grapesberries.pdf)

Growing Blueberries

Another article in this new letter attempts to set you up for success in growing fruit by addressing some of the questions that need to be answered before you do anything. Now let’s consider one of the easiest fruits to grow and one that often produces some fruit even if you skip some of the details. Some fruit is not necessarily a lot of fruit so don’t skip all the details. Full sun is best, but in this case you can tolerate up to about 50% shade – with some reduction in production to be expected. We’re talking about blueberries!

In addition to being an attractive shrub that produces good fall color and edible fruit, blueberries even lend themselves to organic production since they tend to have few pest problems. And you only need one plant to actually produce fruit.

Blueberries do require excellent drainage and do best in soil that has

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had some organic matter added. Fortunately, except for peat moss, most organic materials will improve drainage of clay soils. Till the soil 6 to 8 inches deep in rows 18 to 24 inches wide, apply 3 to 4 inches of something like well-rotted pine bark or leaves, and till again. The addition of organic matter will also allow you to raise the planting area a bit, which may also improve drainage. After that is done you can sample for pH and fertility analysis.

Blueberries do best in soil that is more acid than most plants will tolerate. So the location should also be one that has not been limed. Start with a soil sample. Your soil acidity should be below 5.0 on the pH scale. If the pH is higher than that, it can be lowered with wetable sulfur. If this is necessary, be conservative in your application. It’s easy to apply a little, wait a month, test again, and apply some more if necessary. It’s much more difficult to raise the pH if you get it too low.

What Kind of Blueberries?
In Chatham County you can grow either highbush or rabbiteye blueberries – or both! One criterion for variety selection should be how you want to harvest. If you want to spend a few weekends picking and freezing a lot of blueberries for next winter, then you will select varieties that tend to ripen together in a short time period. On the other hand, if you want to pick a few berries for breakfast every day from June into September, then you’ll select several different varieties of both the highbush and rabbiteye types. If you want to eat some daily and freeze a bunch too, then plant several varieties but mostly just one or two.

The highbush varieties such as Croatan, Bluechip, Blu-ray, and Jersey (in approximate order of ripening) will be ready to pick first, usually in June. The rabbiteye varieties will follow. Again in approximate order of ripening you may select Climax, Premier Tifblue, Ira, Yadkin, or Powderblue. Beyond ripening date, you may have preferences about flavor and graininess. Varieties vary in these traits and it’s largely a matter of personal preference. If you think this is important and don’t know which you prefer, it may be worth your time to spend next summer doing some taste tests with growers who know what they have. Many don’t know and don’t care; if you care, you’ll have to check it out.

Getting Plants in the Ground

Two- to three-year old plants will transplant well. Container grown plants can be planted from early November on. Bare root plants should be planted about the end of February to early March.

Space the plants 5-6 feet apart (wider for rabbiteye). If you are planting multiple rows, allow 8 to 10 feet between them. At 5 to 6 feet you can count on the plants growing into each other. So be sure to allow room to get around them. For small numbers of plants, eight foot spacing may make it easier to work with them if you have room.

When planting on well-prepared soil, it’s a good idea to plant the plants an inch or two above grade so that the top of the root ball is above the soil surface. As the prepared soil settles, the plants will settle also. It’s always better in our area to plant too high rather than too low. Blueberries especially do not respond well to deep planting. You should rake soil or mulch up to and around the root ball to avoid excess drying.

Fertilizing

You’ll want to be careful about fertilizing blueberries. They have lots of fibrous roots near the surface, and they are easily damaged. Do not add any fertilizer when planting. After the first leaves have emerged and reached full size, you can add no more than one tablespoon of fertilizer per plant. That’s correct, one tablespoon per plant. And keep it well away from the stems – about a foot away.

What kind of fertilizer? If you had a soil analysis done, then your soil report indicated what your soil could supply and what you need to supplement. Use the fertilizer suggested there. If you haven’t done an analysis, you may not be as serious about this as you think you are. But you can use any complete fertilizer.

Repeat fertilizer application about 6 weeks after the first application and once more another 6 weeks later. Finish fertilizing about the end of July. In the next growing season you can begin fertilizing about the time new growth starts. Double the amount you used last year (you’re now up to a whopping 2 tablespoons per plant) and apply it about 18 inches from the stems.

Water

Remember water. Water is not only essential to life and growth of your plants, it is also the medium in which fertilizer nutrients get to the plant. So when you fertilize, remember that water is important. Fertilizers act as salts and absorb water wherever they can get it. If the soil is dry they will actually absorb it from the plants. We call this fertilizer burn.

Be sure to keep the plants well watered during the growing season. And also remember that plants get oxygen from the same place they get water. If the soil remains saturated, especially in hot weather, the oxygen demand will not be met and plants may wilt or even die. It’s a careful balancing act.

Mulch

Mulching your blueberries will provide several benefits. It helps to conserve moisture, moderates soil temperatures both summer and winter, and helps with weed control. Apply mulch where you hope roots are growing, but don’t pile it around the stems.

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Weed control
Note that I indicated mulch would help with weed control, not that it will substitute for weed control. Some weeds will thrive in mulch. You may choose to use herbicides with discretion. Or you may use handwork. Remember that the roots are very close to the surface, and are easily damaged. Be careful about using tools such as the hoe. Your best bet may be to apply hand pulling when the soil is moist.

Pruning
When the plants are planted, select about 3 of the stoutest, healthiest stems to keep and remove the others. This is the time to begin building a well-shaped plant. Select well-spaced branches. Remove any flower and fruit buds for the first three years. The early years are for growing a healthy plant; you can make fruit later. Avoid stressing the plant by allowing it to fruit too young.

In the second and third years of growth, concentrate on removing weak or damaged stems and anything dead or diseased. With rabbiteye plants, you may also need to head back vigorous stems that are excessively long. Heading these stems will force side branches and make a stouter stem better able to support a fruit load in later years.

For mature plants, it’s easy to remove at ground level about ¼ of the stems every year. Select the oldest stems to remove and leave younger well-spaced stems. This strategy helps to keep a plant vigorous.

Problems
One of the biggest problems with blueberries is deciding how much to let the birds have. Some folks let the plants get so big that they can’t reach all the berries and concede those to the birds. For plants kept to a manageable size, netting can be used to keep the birds off. You may need to drape it all the way to the ground to keep them from getting beneath and getting trapped, not knowing how to get back out.

Beyond that, blueberries have surprisingly few problems. In some years, Japanese beetles can be troublesome, but seldom serious. Keep an eye out for dead or damaged twigs. A pair of pruners is your best defense against twig blights.

For more information about blueberries, including sources for plants, see http://www.ees.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8207.html. Or contact the Chat- ham County Extension office for a copy.

Tree Topping Hurts
During the coming winter, there’s a good chance that you will see some trees that are topped – hat-racked, tipped, rounded over, headed – there are a variety of terms. This practice is not consistent with professional tree management standards and is practiced only by those who have not kept up with professional standards.

There are several reasons the practice of topping is not good for the tree:

Shock/stress
Branches that have not been exposed to full summer sun are left without any protective shading. Bark and the vital cambium layer beneath may be subject to scalding injury. Injury may lead to cankers, bark splitting, and stem dieback.

The tree that was topped has lost 50 to 100% of its foliage or natural shoot buds. That means it will have to activate new buds beneath the bark by use of stored reserves. If the tree does not have sufficient reserves, it will be seriously weakened.

The stressed tree is more subject to disease and insect pressures. Plants in good health have their own natural resistance mechanisms that are less effective when the tree is using its resources to provide new growth. Severe pruning exposes heartwood and sapwood, and the tree may not be able to seal these wounds in its normal fashion. Some insects are attracted by chemical signals that the plant releases.

Rapid new growth
While many people view topping trees as a means of size reduction, the result is often a weaker tree of the same size. Typical response includes many new shoots (water sprouts) from points near the pruning cuts. These numerous shoots elongate so rapidly that they sometimes reach the original size of the tree prior to pruning.

Greater cost
These numerous shoots are poorly attached. As branches grow normally, they put on a new “ring” of growth every year. Where limbs are attached, the larger branch actually grows over the new limb. In time the limb is well anchored inside the branch from which it arose. New shoots form on the exterior of the branch. Because they grow rapidly, wind catching in the foliage can readily rip these new branches off leaving them littered on the ground.

These weakened branches may also result in increased liability. Because these trees are prone to breakage the branches may be considered hazardous. Because topping is not considered a professional practice, damage may be considered the result of negligence.

Because many people view the topped tree as less aesthetically pleasing there is often reduced property value as a result of topping. Increased sunlight below the canopy can result in loss of other plants not adapted to the new light levels.

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Tree Topping Hurts

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Potential of death
All trees are destined to die of course. Some older trees are more or less tolerant of abusive pruning. A tree that already had problems may be on a steady decline merely hastened by the act of topping.

What can you do instead?
If you exercise the option to actually plant a tree, investigate its size potential before selection. Then make sure that you provide it sufficient space so that some future resident will not have to make hard decisions.

If the tree must be reduced in size, consult a competent arborist who knows how to reduce the crown by making proper thinning cuts. These cuts remove a branch back to their point of origin where the lateral branch is at least one-third the diameter of the branch being removed. In this case, there will be a natural point from which the tree begins to seal off the wounds. And sometimes the best option is to remove the tree and replace it with a smaller one.

In selecting someone to work on trees there are a lot of issues to consider. The cheapest price may sometimes result in the greatest cost over the long term. For more information about how to select an arborist, see Selecting a Tree Care Company at http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/chatham/ag/homehort/GreenInd/treehire.html. Or contact the Chatham County Extension office for a copy.

Herbaceous Plants That Live Through Winter

By definition, all of our perennials live through winter. At least the ones that don’t die because they were poorly selected for our climate or because of something we did or didn’t or because they just didn’t like us. But as the days of autumn shorten to the winter solstice something in us humans conjures up “the light.” And we look to evergreen not only for the holly-days but in our gardens as well.

So, a few low-growing, evergreen (or nearly so), herbaceous plants for you to consider. (Herbaceous refers to those plants that do not form a woody stem.)

_Ajuga reptans_, bugle weed – this plant is typically used as a ground cover at which it is quite efficient, spreading rapidly by running stolons. Be aware of this when planting. Some have regarded it as invasive, but the only place I’ve ever seen it “take over” is where it was planted near a lawn. If you have a shaded lawn, that may be a good thing. Tolerates sun but does best in part to full shade. Deep green foliage shading to purple is its primary attribute. But six-inch purple flower spikes in spring can be quite stunning. _A. genevensis_ and _A. pyramidalis_ are reported to be less aggressive.

_Artemisia spp., wormwood_ – the first thing you have to notice about these species is aroma, usually strong and pungent. Before you plant any of them, brush the foliage and make sure you like what you smell. These plants have had multiple uses by herbalists for centuries. But we are not practicing medicine here, and we’ll restrict ourselves to ornamental properties. Most of these will range 2 to 3 feet high with some variation of gray-green foliage, usually dissected and lacy. The color is useful in setting off or blending other colors in the garden.

Arum italicum, Italian arum – these plants have a terrific strategy for dealing with summer: avoid it; go on vacation. Their life cycle in our world is completely out of sync with our normal expectations. New foliage emerges with shorter days and cooler temperatures of September. The plant showcases its rich green foliage throughout the winter then blooms in late spring. The blooms are cream-colored spathes similar to Jack-in-the-Pulpit and gives way to orange-red berries in late spring. At that point the plant goes dormant and leaves you to deal with summer by yourself. Be sure it’s in a place where the soil won’t stay soggy all summer or it won’t come back.

_Bergenia spp., pigsqueak_ – OK, why is it called pigsqueak? If you rub the thick, glossy foliage between thumb and forefinger, you may get the sound for which this plant is known. Practice. Flowers range through the pink and rose shades, but the foliage is the primary draw for _Bergenia_ (all pig squeaking aside). Large glossy leaves often take on a red to purple hue with cold weather. With really cold weather, they may look like they need to be cleaned up by winter’s end. Probably most effective in morning shade in moist, well-drained soil.

_Chrysogonum virginianum_, green-and-gold – gold flowers against green foliage give this plant its common name. Some-
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times regarded as insufficiently floriferous, if it had more flowers the name would have to be changed to gold-and-gold. Plants grow as well-defined clumps 6 – 8 inches wide and bloom dependably throughout May and June. May continue to bloom sporadically dependably throughout May and June. Does well in shade and will tolerate full sun if water is adequate.

**Cyclamen coum, C. hederifolium, hardy cyclamen** – this is not the greenhouse plant that you see at Christmas or Valentines. These will be dormant through the summer and grow from fall to spring with fragrant flowers from late fall into winter. Plants are grown from corms (think Crocus) and require excellent drainage and light shade. Drainage is especially important in summer when there is no foliage to speed the drying of soil. Improve drainage with leaf mold, well rotted pine bark, and/or pea gravel. These plants take 2 to 4 years to grow to flowering size. So we can’t complain about the price. And if they are too cheap, we should ask if they are nursery propagated or dug from the wild.

**Delosperma cooperi, D. nubigenum, ice plant** – the first has purple flowers, the latter orange-yellow. And those are the major differences in these two species. *D. nubigenum* is more cold tolerant, but both can do well in zone 7. Grow in full sun, and water only at planting. After that, water is seldom an issue except when excessive. These low growing succulents bloom for about two months in spring then remain bright light green for the rest of the year.

**Dianthus gratianopolitanus** 'Firewitch', 'Bath's Pink,' pinks – pinks are some of the oldest plants to grace the flowerbed and there are many, many varieties and colors to choose from today. All do best in full sun with good drainage. Despite being “perennial,” many will last only 2-3 years. The varieties cited are among the more persistent. (And a malevolent professor required us to spell the species name! It didn’t stick, but I know how to look it up.) Plants are less tolerant of acid soils.

**Helleborus spp., hellebore; H. niger, Christmas rose; H. orientalis, Lenten rose; H. foetidus, bearsfoot hellebore** – shiny, dark, coarse textured, leathery foliage grows 12 to 18 inches tall. These tolerate some sun but all do best in shade. *H. niger* flowers are white with yellow stamens, sometimes at Christmas but usually later. Considered the most difficult to grow unless you have just the right combination of moisture, drainage, shade, and just slightly alkaline soil. *H. orientalis* flowers range from white to pink to lavender in winter. This one is easy to grow if you pay attention to the basics. *H. foetidus* flowers are pale green from late winter into early spring. Be aware that the botanical epithet ‘foetidus” refers to a particularly foul smell to these flowers that attract flies rather than bees as pollinators. All of these have long bloom periods lasting 2 to 4 months. All require good drainage.

**Heuchera americana, alumroot** – this plant is native locally, and many cultivated varieties have been introduced into the marketplace, primarily for outstanding or interesting leaf color. The red to purple foliage is the primary reason for growing this species. Unless drought interferes, it will continue to produce new foliage through fall and winter. Flowers are small on long stems and not especially showy. But they do add an interesting texture and are sometimes placed fortuitously enough that we view other plants through their veil. Needs to be in shade with adequate moisture. Several other available *Heuchera spp.* are native to western North America.

**Hexastylis arifolia, H. shuttleworthii H. virginica, wild ginger** – but this is not the source of culinary ginger (*Zingiber officinale*). It is a group of woodland plants (sometimes identified as Asarum rather than *Hexastylis*) native to North America that thrive in deep shade. The native woodland conditions that gardeners seek to emulate usually include deep shade, slightly acid soil, and the elusive combination of constant moisture with good drainage. Leaves are an attractive glossy green. Flowers must be searched out; they are small, brown, urn-shaped, and hidden beneath the leaves. *H. arifolia* has large arrow-shaped leaves. The others are rounded to heart shaped.

**Iberis sempervirens, candytuft** – actually one of our small woody shrubs, it seldom reaches more than a foot in height. Consequently, it is generally thought of as a perennial. It is frequently used as a small edging plant or in rock gardens. White flowers show up by late winter and continue through spring to early summer. Very dependable bloom persists throughout the spring. Best in full sun. Will tolerate some shade with some sacrifice of bloom.

**Ligularia tussilaginea, leopard plant** – one writer refers to this one as a green thing splashed with ugly yellow spots. There’s no accounting for taste. Grows 2 to 3 feet tall primarily for the foliage, however gaudy. Looks best from late summer to fall. Flowers are not particularly showy but contribute to the touch of yellow. My colleague out in Manteo finds this one dependable all winter. In our area it may need an occasional trimming after severe cold. Will grow best in shade with a steady water supply.

**Liriope spp., lily-turf, monkey grass** – one of the most commonly used ground covers in the south, the plants tolerate almost all growing conditions. Known for their lanceolate, grass-like foliage, they are not grasses but actually in the lily family. *L. muscari* tends to grow in...
Herbaceous Plants
That Live Through Winter

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Lysimachia nummularia, creeping Jenny – low growing, rapidly spreading, prostrate ground cover with long stems capable of rooting at every node if moisture is adequate. Performs best in moist shade. The popular golden leaved cultivar ‘Aurea’ lends a welcome brightness to deep shade. Also used at the edges of water gardens.

Mentha spp., mint – whether any of the mints will be evergreen for you depends on the nature of the winter and where you locate it. Low growing varieties between bricks or in rock gardens may benefit from the heat retention and re-radiation of brick and stone. There are seemingly endless varieties from which to choose. Most will tolerate light shade or full sun if water is available and almost any soil.

Mitchella repens, partridge berry – a native of local woodlands, this one is not easy to find but is available from some nurseries. A very low growing woodland plant of rich soils and shade, it has showy red berries that persist through the winter.

Ophiopogon japonicus, mondo grass – the narrow, dark green, grass-like blades growing 6 to 8 inches long make this an obvious ground cover where shade is too deep for real grass (like Liriope, this is in the lily family). A dwarf variety grows even lower at 2 to 4 inches. Good soil preparation is essential if rapid coverage is important. Tolerates full sun but will look “burned” by the end of winter.

Phlox subulata, moss phlox – not for those who eschew the ordinary, this one is great for those in search of easy. It performs best in full sun with good drainage, but its wide variety of uses suggests it can grow almost anywhere. Various flower colors include white, pink, purple, and blue. P. subulata, native to eastern North America is easy to find at garden centers in the spring. A bit more difficult to find is the locally native P. nivalis. But it is difficult to distinguish one from the other.

Polystichum acrostichoides, Christmas fern – like most ferns, this one does best in partial to full shade on rich moist soils. It is native to and commonly found in local woodlands where it remains evergreen through the winter. Easy to grow and combines well with other shade species.

Santolina chamaecyparisus, S. verna, lavender cotton – S. chamaecyparisus achieves a gray-green foliage; S. virens is bright green and now more officially named S. rosmaninifolia. Foliage of each is highly aromatic. They are commonly used to trail over walls, in rock gardens, or as border or edging plants. They do best in full sun and are very tolerant of dry conditions. They will have fungal problems in our hot humid summers unless (perhaps even if) there is good air movement around them. And good drainage is a must.

Sedum spp., stonecrop – Many, but not all, Sedum are evergreen providing varying shades of green through the winter. Fleshy, succulent leaves may take on a bronze hue. They are drought tolerant and low maintenance and perform best in full sun with good drainage. They are often used in rock gardens for their winter interest. There are scores, even hundreds of species. Even experts are often hard pressed to confirm an exact identification.

Teucrium chamaedrys, germander – a small shrub to about a foot tall with aromatic evergreen foliage. They are frequently used as a small border hedge, but probably far more ornamental when allowed to develop a more natural shape. Red-purple flowers show up in late spring, but this is really a foliage plant. Grows best in full sun, will tolerate some afternoon shade.

Thymus spp., thyme – common thyme, wild thyme, woolly thyme, lemon thyme, caraway thyme, lemon-scented thyme, … there seems no end to the variety of thymes available. All do best in full sun with good drainage. They may “melt out” in hot humid summers but usually recover when the weather abates. They form a dense fragrant carpet that requires little maintenance unless you need to rein it in. Flowers are rich in nectar and attractive to bees.

Veronica umbrosa, ‘Georgia Blue' and V. peduncularis, ‘Waterperry Blue’ – both of these are reported to change from dark green to purple or copper foliage as weather cools. Whether they are evergreen will depend to some extent on the nature of the winter. But both of these “creeping speedwells” will be covered with a mass of light blue flowers from late winter well into spring. Both do well in full sun or tolerate some afternoon shade. Not very demanding about soil, but drainage helps. Used in rock gardens or as ground cover.

Thanks to the following Extension Agents and Specialist who provided suggestions for this list: Chris Ruth, Susan Ruiz-Evans, Linda Blue, Lucy Bradley, Charlotte Glen, David Barkley.
The Complete Gardener Classes

Extension Agent Al Cooke will again be offering The Complete Gardener Series, a complete series of gardening classes that should be useful to novices and advanced gardeners alike, especially those new to the area. Classes will be held in the downstairs auditorium of the Agriculture Building in Pittsboro on Tuesday evenings, 6:00 to 8:30 p.m. Classes will begin promptly at 6:00. Participants should arrive a few minutes early to register, pick up materials, find a seat, and be ready to work. Individuals may choose any or all of the smorgasbord of classes depending on specific interests. Several of the classes will cover general gardening disciplines. Everyone should plan to attend the first three sessions in addition to those on insects, plant diseases, and weeds.

The schedule of classes is listed below. Please note that due to facility schedules, there will not be a class some weeks.

Cost of the classes will cover materials and refreshments. Individuals may register for $20, or $30 for couples sharing one set of printed materials. Individuals may register for single classes for $5 per class. To reserve a space send a completed registration form (see insert in this newsletter) with check or money order payable to “Chatham County Extension” to PO Box 279, Pittsboro, NC 27312 (attention Susan Graham). In order to assure yourself a space and materials, please register no later than December 31. Light refreshments and soft drinks will be provided for each session. Individuals are encouraged to come directly from work and to bring sandwiches or more substantial foods.

Schedule of Classes (subject to change)

January
30 Plants and How They Work: Botany for Gardeners

February
13 My Shovel Won’t Dig: What’s Up with this Dirt?
20 The Gardener’s 1,000-Pound Gorilla: Fertilizers and Water Quality
27 You Are Not a Fruit (But You Can Grow Some)

March
13 Vegetables: Not Just Between Your Ears
20 Just Remember: Nobody Ever Made Any Real Money from Knowing about Trees and Shrubs
27 Smokin’: Keep off the (Lawn) Grass

April
10 And on the Eighth Day God Created Weeds!
17 Return to Haight-Ashbury: Flowers and Herbs
24 I’m Not Hungry: Who Needs Insects Anyway?

May
15 Take 2 Aspirin: Plants Get Diseases?
22 In Which Pooh Meets a Deer (and Other Residents of the 100 Acre Wood)
29 Jivin’ with Mr. Natural: Organic Gardening
The Complete Gardener 2007

Please complete this registration form. Mail it along with your check in an envelope addressed to:
Attn: Susan Graham, Chatham County Cooperative Extension, PO Box 279, Pittsboro, NC 27312-0279.

Name _____________________________________________________________________________
Name _____________________________________________________________________________
Address ___________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
Telephone _______________________ (where you can be reached in case of inclement weather, etc.)
Email Address ______________________________________________________________________

Cost of the classes will cover materials and refreshments. Individuals may register for $20, or $30 for couples sharing
one set of printed materials. Individuals may register for single classes for $5 per class. Checks should be made pay-
able to Chatham County Cooperative Extension and mailed to Attn: Susan Graham, Chatham County Extension, PO
Box 279, Pittsboro, NC 27312-0279. Questions? Call 919.542.8202 or email to susan_s_graham@ncsu.edu

Please indicate by checking below which classes you are registering for.

_______ $20.00 all classes in series for individual  _______ $30.00 all classes in series for couple
 sharing materials.

I am interested in attending the following classes for $5.00 per class (please check appropriate class).

_______ January 30 - Plants and How They Work - Botany for Gardeners
_______ February 13 - My Shovel Won’t Dig: What’s Up with this Dirt?
_______ February 20 - The Gardener’s 1,000-Pound Gorilla: Fertilizers and Water Quality
_______ February 27 - You Are Not a Fruit (But You Can Grown Some)
_______ March 13 - Vegetables: Not Just Between Your Ears
_______ March 20 - Just Remember: Nobody Ever Made Any Real Money from Knowing about
    Trees and Shrubs
_______ March 27 - Smokin’: Keep off the (Lawn) Grass
_______ April 10 - And on the Eighth Day God Created Weeds!
_______ April 17 - Return to Haight-Ashbury: Flowers and Herbs
_______ April 24 - I’m Not Hungry: Who Needs Insects Anyway?
_______ May 15 - Take 2 Aspirin: Plants Get Diseases?
_______ May 22 - In Which Pooh Meets a Deer (and Other Residents of the 100 Acre Wood)
_______ May 29 - Jivin’ with Mr. Natural: Organic Gardening

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