



The Crazy Gardener

*Horticulture Newsletter put out by
Sampson Community College Horticulture Club*

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Backyard Habitat at Sampson Community College

The word is out on the grapevine that Sampson Community College Gardens put out the welcome mat for all kinds of birds, butterflies, and other wildlife, while helping to protect the local environment. The college property is now recognized as an official National Wildlife Federation (NWF) Backyard Wildlife Habitat site. SCC Gardens joined the many habitat enthusiasts who, with the help of NWF, have turned their properties into enticing wildlife refuges.

NWF began the Backyard Wildlife Habitat program in 1973, and has since certified over 36,000 habitats nationwide. The majority of these sites represent the hard work and commitment of individuals and families providing habitats near their homes, but NWF has also certified more than 1900 schools and hundreds of business and community sites like the SCC Gardens.

By creating a backyard habitat, Nancy Olsen, Horticulture Department Chair, and the horticulture students have learned the rewards of “gardening for wildlife” the program teaches the importance of environmental stewardship by providing people with basic guidelines for making their landscapes more hospitable to wildlife.

Backyard Wildlife Habitat sites can provide a source of solace, comfort and confidence in the future. Protecting the natural beauty of places we love and the

wildlife they support is at the heart, and renew faith in our countries tomorrow. Backyard Wildlife Habitat sites provide for the wildlife in our communities, but at the same time they offer a human refuge too. Providing the strength and hope we need to face an uncertain future.

Crape Myrtles

These are the first days of summer, and most flowering trees and shrubs have finished their peak of bloom long ago. Not so with the crape myrtle! Just when it seems we must turn to leaves and bark for the color, the bright, ruffled blooms of the crape myrtle burst into pink, lavender and white all over southern gardens, parks and home-landscapes.

Most of our crape myrtle plantings are made up of *Lagerstromia indica* and *faurei*. Crape myrtle, also known as “Flower of the South”, is a favorite small tree or large shrub and performs beautifully in most parts of North Carolina.

It is often rare for a flowering plant to have several landscape characteristics which can be as interesting as the flower. Crape myrtle possesses several, such as flowers, bark color and texture, form and shape, fall foliage, color, and interesting seed pods which persist in the winter. *L. faurei* has beautiful exfoliating bark. When this plant matures, its smooth, grey-green bark peels away to reveal patches of warm, cinnamon colored new bark for a great visual effect.

Crape myrtle has many landscape uses. Because the ultimate height is that of a small tree (below 30 feet) and the roots can exist in a somewhat restricted area, the crape myrtle is ideal for use under utility lines and between sidewalk and the street. They do very well in large planter boxes. Many homeowners use the crape myrtle as a specimen tree in a garden setting, often under planted with a groundcover. When located in a shrub bed about the house as a “foundation planting,” the tree should be set at least 10 feet from the walls. Several new introductions of true dwarfs can be used in planters as a small, flowering deciduous shrub.

The ideal planting site would be one with well-drained soil, full sunny exposure and good air drainage. Crape myrtles do not flower well in partial shade and not at all in heavy shade. Powdery mildew is a serious disease problem, but this can be minimized by locating in an open area where air movement will not be restricted.

Crape myrtles grow well in most of our heavy loam and clay soils in North Carolina and tolerate a pH range of 5.0 - 6.5. Nutrient requirements are generally minimum. Two light applications of a complete fertilizer in spring and summer are adequate. With heavy fertilizer applications the plants flower less, produce lush vegetative growth and are subject to winter injury.

Crape myrtles have a shallow fibrous root system and should be planted in a slightly raised manner. The best planting times are spring, summer and early fall, so the roots can become well established.

Crape myrtles can be grown as large or small single or multi-stem deciduous shrubs. The lower weaker branches can be removed in the early stages. The flowers are borne terminally on the current season’s growth. Crape myrtles can be drastically pruned if needed, but can lose the natural, graceful effect if pruned several feet off the ground.



Flower colors range from dark red, rose, pink and lavender to white. The growth habit categories are listed dwarf - less than 3 feet to tall - more than 12 feet.



Re-Engineering Your Garden

Re-engineering is a popular buzz word today. Corporations use it to describe changes they are making in their market focus or their corporate structure. Basically, it means taking a look at where you are and reassessing what you can do to capitalize on what you have. And what holds true for established corporations surprisingly holds true for the established home garden.

As the landscape matures, things change. Trees get taller and cast deeper shade, bushes out grow their original compactness in the garden. People’s lifestyles change, and that area given over to a sandbox or a swing set may no longer be needed. Or you may have purchased an older home with “mature plantings” that no longer work, or at least they don’t satisfy you. The time comes in almost every landscape plan when “re-engineering” is the way to go.

A Fresh Look...To start re-engineering a garden you have to take a hard, honest look at what you have. Because changes in the garden can happen subtly over years, you might overlook the obvious, such as an increase in shade or a physical change in your garden. For example, maybe you added a deck and now traffic patterns have changed, or you took down the swing set and the focal point of your garden is now in the wrong place, etc. Pretend you are the new owner of the house and garden you are surveying, and look at it with as much objectivity as you can.

Back to the Drawing Board... Is there an orderly look to your garden, or has it just “happened” over time? Even “natural” gardens have a plan behind them that keeps them looking natural instead of wild. If there hasn’t been a plan, this is the place to start. Depending on the size of your garden and

how elaborate you want to make it, you can plan it yourself or call on professional help.

Even if you call on a professional, do have some plan in mind as to what you want your garden to ultimately look like. Take one area at a time and think about how you want it to look, and then move on to the next area. If your garden does not naturally break into "areas", think about creating them by varying garden bed sizes, shapes and what plants they will contain. You may want to add a garden bed or two, or take some beds out.

A planned garden does not have to happen all at once. If you develop an overall plan, you can work one or two areas at a time and save work on other areas for later in the year or even until the next season or two.

Dealing with Shade....In evaluating your existing garden, you may find that some plants don't perform as well as they use to. It could be that they need more light. Consider moving these to another area of the garden and finding new shade tolerant plants to replace them. Begonias, impatiens and other shade tolerant plants can give a bright show of color where petunias no longer perform well.

If you are uncertain about how well a plant will perform in a problem area, plant

one or two plants of the varieties you would like in the ground or in a container and test them for one season. Next time around, plant more of those that did well, and test some others for future plantings. Many gardeners annually try out "new" plants on a small scale before really committing any amount of time or money to them.

Trees and shrubs... One of the biggest changes that can creep up silently on a garden is the growth of trees and shrubs. They grow taller and wider making less space around them. Trees can be pruned professionally to thin out branches and allow more light to filter through to the ground. In extreme cases, such as too many trees planted to close together (or that somehow just grew there), removal of some of the trees in addition to trimming may be the answer. Professional advice and service from tree experts is highly recommended for trimming and removal. Overgrown shrubs can also be trimmed back or removed entirely if no longer desirable. As much as it hurts emotionally and as much as it can be visually unattractive for a while, a severe trimming (almost to the ground) of shrubs may be the best thing you can do. In a year or two, you will have reengineered your trees and shrubs and will have forgotten how large they once were.

Things To Do in July



*Don't overdo it in the heat! Save the hardest garden jobs for early in the morning or late in the day.

*House plants that are outdoors for the summer should be carefully monitored for moisture since they can easily absorb almost twice the water they used indoors.

*Prune Bigleaf or French Hydrangeas (*H. macrophylla*), those with large, pink or blue "snowball" flowers, immediately after flowering.

*Although tomatoes are self-pollinating, they need air movement to transfer pollen. If it is hot and calm for several days, gently shake plants for assured transfer and fruit set. Drought and hot, dry winds can cause pepper and tomato blossoms to drop off. Try

misting plants twice a day to cool them and help the blossoms set fruit.

*July is a good time to trim the "bleeders" in the landscape. Maples, birches and dogwoods can be lightly pruned at the bark-branch ridge. This is also a good time to prune water sprouts from crabapples, Crape myrtles and all fruit trees.

*Once established, lawns can be irrigated only when they show signs of stress. Water stress indicators include a blue-grey cast to the turf and visible footprints remaining on the lawn when you walk on it. You can help conserve water by watering the lawn only when needed.



Things To Do in August



tomatoes.

*Spider webs in your trees? Fall webworms will be making their appearance now with their tell-tale silky homes on the branches of various trees and shrubs, especially pecans.

*Tis the season for tiny terrors. Minute menaces such as aphids, cucumber beetles, spider mites, squash bugs, squash vine borers, thrips and white flies will be at their worst during hot weather.

*Many plants look wilted on hot afternoons even when there is moisture in the soil. Their roots can't take up water fast enough to compensate for the water being lost through the leaves. If there is enough soil moisture, plants will recover by late afternoon. If they don't perk up, water deeply.

*Treat lawn areas for grubs. Use recommended insecticides.

*Whenever you apply pesticides, adhere strictly to the directions on the package. Do not spray when temperatures are over 85 degrees F or when the wind is up.

Things To Do in September

*If you plan to relocate any shrubs or small trees this winter, root-prune them now to make the move less stressful.

*Dig new garden beds for next spring. Incorporate plenty of organic matter such as leaves and leave the soil rough to allow good water penetration. Plant a cover crop, also called green manure, to increase the soil's organic matter content.

*House plants that have been outside all summer should be allowed to make a fairly slow transition to indoor conditions. Quick changes in environment can result in yellowed foliage and leaf drop. To avoid injury, bring plants indoors before temperatures dip below 55 degrees F. Check for insect pests before you move the plants; it is easier to get rid of pests while plants are still outside.

*Pick up dropped fruit so that deer and rodents will not be attracted to the fruit for feeding on it and your growing trees. Raking and disposing of diseased leaves will help keep insects and diseases under control next season.

*When fertilizing, make it a point never to fertilize a dry plant. Drought stressed plants will quickly take up water which could leave it vulnerable to uptake high levels of fertilizer which could lead to the burning of the roots and leaves.



Hopefully you have enjoyed your first issues of the Crazy Gardener and have found many helpful hints in this issue. Subscriptions will be sold starting January 2007, for five dollars (\$5) per year to be delivered to your door. You may also get the Crazy Gardener free of charge at your computer. Please send your subscription or e-mail to Sampson Community College, PO Box 318, Clinton, NC 28329: Attention: Lisa Horne. Any questions please contact us at (910) 592-8081 Ext 7000. **Please fill out the below form to receive your snail mail and e-mail subscriptions.**

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