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Gardening in February

Lawn Care

- Cool season lawns should be fertilized in February. Follow soil test recommendations. In absence of a soil test add 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 square foot of lawn area.
- Access NC State TurfFiles at <http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/index.php> There are many tips, news, upcoming events, and publications that are helpful on this website.

Edibles

- Time to start planting those cool season vegetables. The extension office has a Quick Reference Guide that contains a list of vegetables and the dates to plant them in Forsyth County as well as a few locations to find vegetable seeds of varieties that do well in our area.
- If not already applied you should use dormant oil on fruit trees to kill insect eggs before leaf and flower buds begin to expand.
- Prune trees as soon as the flower buds swell and show some color.

Ornamental Plants and Other

- Prune plants that bloom on current season's growth in late February, such as Butterfly Bush.
- Trim ornamental grasses, such as liriope, mondo grass, and pampas grass.
- Plant trees and shrubs now so the roots can get established before hot dry weather.

- Cut back those overgrown evergreen shrubs now. Any type of severe pruning should be done in February.
- February is a good month to also plant bare root material such as roses.
- Start dividing perennials such as daylily and shasta daisy in February and continue through March.
- Of course don't forget loved ones on Valentine's Day. Red roses remain a favorite gift, but there are so many other rose colors, flowers, and even other live plants you might consider. If buying cut flowers, buy them just beginning to open and they'll generally last longer. Buy flowers or bouquets with good leaves, and flowers without breakage or disease. Protect from cold on the way home, and use a flower preservative in the water.
- Other tips for this month include ordering seeds if you plan to use them at home for the flower garden. Watch newspapers and magazines for flower shows and seminars at local garden stores. Surf online to find nursery websites, both local and mail order, to discover new plant introductions for this year's garden.
- Now that the days are getting longer, your houseplants will be resuming vigorous growth, so begin fertilizing with a soluble fertilizer. A seaweed/fish emulsion blend is a good choice -- but look for one labeled as "no odor" to avoid the usual pungent smell.

Growing Carrots in the Home Garden

Climatic Requirements

The carrot is a hardy, cool season crop that can be planted in the garden as soon as the soil can be prepared in the spring. Carrots require relatively large amounts of moisture and are not tolerant of drought. Prolonged hot weather in the later stages of development may not only retard growth but result in an undesirable strong flavor and coarseness in the roots. At the other extreme, prolonged temperatures below 55 degrees F tend to make the roots longer, more slender and paler in color than expected. The best temperature for highest quality roots is between 60 and 70 degrees F.



Soils

Carrot plants thrive in deep, loose, well-drained soil. Avoid stony, cloddy or trash-laden soils as they increase the incidence of root defects. Because raised-beds usually have loose soil and receive little compaction from foot traffic, they are an ideal location to grow carrots. Carrots grown on heavy soils may produce considerable leaf growth and forked roots. Best to add a 2-inch layer of compost for our clay soils. Carrot plants do not grow well in strongly acid soils; therefore, a pH range of 6.0 to 6.8 should be maintained for best results.

Fertilizers

Fertilizers and lime are best applied to soils for carrot production using soil test results as a guide. Arrangements for soil testing can be made through the North Carolina Department of Agriculture, boxes are available at the Extension Office. Carrots require large amounts of plant nutrient elements, particularly potassium, for good production. A fertilizer with the ratio of 1-2-2 such as a 5-10-10 analysis would be appropriate at the time of seeding and again when tops are three to four inches tall and six to eight inches tall. Too much manure and fertilizer applied just before seeding can result in forked roots.

Establishing the Planting

Direct seed carrots into a well-prepared soil. Suggested planting depth is 1/4 inch deep in rows spaced 12 to 18 inches or more apart depending on the method of cultivation used. It is important to avoid crusting of the soil around the seed bed. Covering the seed with vermiculite or fine compost and keeping the soil evenly moist until the seedlings have emerged will help prevent this problem. After the seedlings have emerged, thin them to one inch apart. When the tops of the carrots grow thicker, thin them to about two to three inches apart. Some seed companies are now offering pelletized seed, making the seeds easier to plant and thin.

Cultural Practices

After plants are established, applied mulches will help conserve moisture and suppress weed growth. Cultivation, if necessary, should be shallow in order to avoid root injury. Carrots require an evenly distributed and plentiful soil moisture supply throughout the growing season. However, avoid too much moisture towards the end of the season as this will cause roots to crack. Watch for the appearance of orange crowns at the soil level as the plants mature. If this occurs, mulch with soil or compost as the sunlight will turn them green.

Harvesting and Storage

Harvest can begin when carrots are finger size. In general, the smaller carrots are juicier and tender. You do not have to harvest the entire crop at once. They can remain in the soil until you are ready to use them. Carrots will last until winter in the soil if mulched well. Carrots are best stored at temperatures near freezing in a moist environment.

Varieties

Choosing a variety depends upon your preference and your soil type. Shorter types such as Red-Cored Chantenay and Short and Sweet seem better suited for heavy soils. Other varieties include Nantes Half-long, Danvers Half-long, Pioneer and Spartan Bonus. Gourmet varieties such as Little Finger are also excellent in container gardens.

Brighten Your Meals with Home Grown Edible Flowers

Most home gardeners grow flowers for the beauty they give us in our gardens or for cutting to take inside our homes to enjoy. Very few of us raise flowers to eat. Many flowers are edible and bring interesting flavors to various dishes. Eating flowers is not as unusual as we may think and has been part of our diet for centuries. We have used flowers for teas and flower parts for flavorings, soups, pies and stir fries in many different countries. Many flowers we grow today were grown historically for their attributes of aroma and flavor instead of their beauty. Some flowers are also high in nutrition such as rose hips and nasturtiums which are high in vitamin C. Dandelion blooms contain vitamins A and C.

Any flower that is not poisonous or causes an allergic reaction is considered edible. Just because it is edible does not mean we should eat it because it just may not taste good. Before you head out to the flower bed and gather up some flowers to eat there are some cautions you should consider:



- ▶ Don't eat flowers if you have allergies, hay fever, or asthma.
- ▶ Only eat flowers that have been grown in the absence of pesticides due to residues.
- ▶ Be sure you positively identify a flower before eating. Know the flower by the botanical name.
- ▶ Harvest flowers in the cooler part of the day such as morning or evening.
- ▶ Cut them with stem intact and keep in water or store in damp paper towels in the frig.
- ▶ Flowers should be in the peak of bloom and fully open.
- ▶ Only eat flowers if you are absolutely certain they are edible. Some flowers are just a garnish.
- ▶ Never eat flowers from the roadside, a florist, or a nursery.
- ▶ Most flowers listed as edible refer to the petals only. Remove the pistils and stamens.
- ▶ Expect the flower's flavor to vary with the season and growing location.

Some common landscape flowers, trees and shrubs have blooms that should always be avoided. Such as clematis, azaleas, daffodils, fox-glove, rhododendron, oleander, hyacinths, calla lily and castor beans. I have listed flowers by their description you can grow in your flower or vegetable garden. This is just a sampling of the many edibles but be sure and do a lot of research before you start flower grazing.

Annuals

- ▶ Squash (*Curcubita*) - yellow, orange colored with raw squash flavor
- ▶ Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*) - white, red colored with watercress or pepper flavor
- ▶ Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) - yellow, gold colored with pepper flavor
- ▶ Pansy/viola (*Viola*) - violet, white, pink, multi-colored with sweet flavor
- ▶ Petunia (*Petunia hybrid*) - wide range of colors with a mild flavor
- ▶ Garden salvia (*Salvia officinalis*) - blue, purple, white or pink colors with musky flavor
- ▶ Radish (*Raphanus sativus*) - yellow color with spicy hot flavor
- ▶ Snapdragon (*Antirrhinum*) - range of colors with a bland or bitter flavor



Perennials

- ▶ Bee balm (*Monarda didyma*) - white or pink colors with mild sweet flavor
- ▶ Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*) - white, lavender, or purple colors with onion flavor
- ▶ Borage (*Borage officinalis*) - blue, purple, or lavender colors with cucumber-like flavor
- ▶ Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) - yellow color with slightly bitter flavor
- ▶ Red clover (*Trifolium pratense*) - pink or red color with a sweet flavor
- ▶ Tulips (*Tulipa*) - various colors with a sweet flavor
- ▶ Daylily (*Hemerocallis*) - various colors with a summer squash or slight asparagus flavor
- ▶ Dianthus (*Dianthus*) - various colors with a spicy clove like flavor

- ▶ Violet (*Viola odorata*) – violet, pink, or white color with either a sweet or sour flavor

Trees and Shrubs

- ▶ Rose (*Rosa*) – various colors with either a sweet or bitter flavor
- ▶ Linden (*Tilia*) – white to yellow color with a honey like flavor
- ▶ Hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*) – orange or red color with cranberry or citrus flavor
- ▶ Elderberry (*Sambucus*) – white flower with sweet flavor
- ▶ Apple (*Malus*) – white to pink flowers with a slightly sour taste
- ▶ Plum (*Prunus*) – pink to white flowers with a mild flavor



Eating flowers can be fun and add some interesting flavors to dishes. Be careful there are a number of poisonous plants that contain substances that can cause symptoms such as an upset stomach. Eat flowers in moderation as we all know one can have too much of a good thing.

Upcoming Gardening Programs

- ◆ Feb 16, 11am—Proper Care of Tools, taught by Craig Mauney at the Tanglewood Arboretum office.
- ◆ March 1, 7pm—Grafting Demo, taught by Jim Nottke at Lewisville Library.
- ◆ March 2, 11am—Cottage Gardens at Reynolda, taught by David Bare at the Tanglewood Arboretum office.
- ◆ March 8, 7pm—Organic Gardening 201, taught by Craig Mauney at Rural Hall Library.
- ◆ March 14, 6pm—Growing Blueberries, taught by Bill Colvin at Clemmons Library.
- ◆ March 15, 7pm—Easy Care Annuals and Perennials, taught by Doug Grimes at Lewisville Library.
- ◆ March 22, 7pm—Four Season Vegetable Gardening, taught by Katey Burchette at Central Library.
- ◆ March 24, 2pm—Vegetable Gardening 101, taught by Ann Williams at Reynolda Manor Library.

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