

November 2012



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**Dividing Perennials** *by Craig Mauney, Horticulture Agent*

There are three main reasons why you would divide perennial flowers – to increase the number of plants, to help the plant to rejuvenate and to control the size of the clump. One can divide perennials in the spring or fall of the year. We can divide them best when they are not flowering so that all the plant’s energy can go to the root and leaf development. It is best to divide at least 4-6 weeks before a hard freeze. After dividing, be sure and mulch around the newly planted perennials. It is better not to divide a perennial on a hot sunny fall day so wait until you have a cloudy day or even just after a rain. Most perennials should be divided every three to five years. Signs that perennials need dividing include symptoms such as flowers that are smaller than normal, centers of the clumps are hollow and dead, or when the bottom foliage is sparse and poor. Plants growing and blooming well are best left alone unless you just want more of the same plant.

The following are some tips to help you be successful when you divide.

**Plan Ahead** – Water the plants to be divided thoroughly a day or two before. Prepare the areas that you plan to put your new divisions before you lift up the parent plant. Prune the stems and foliage to 6 inches from the ground to ease division.

**Lift up the Parent Plant** – Use a sharp shovel or spade fork to lift or dig the plant on all four sides about 4 inches away from the plant. Pry underneath with your tool until the whole clump will come up. If the plant is large and heavy, you may need to cut it into several pieces with your shovel before you lift it out of the hole. Otherwise, lift the whole plant and then cut into pieces.

**Separating the Plant** – Shake or hose off loose soil and remove all the dead leaves and stems. Perennials have different

root systems and each one needs to be treated a little different as described.

• **Spreading root system:** These have slender matted roots that originate from many locations with no distinct pattern. They can usually be pulled apart by hand or cut apart with shears.

• **Clumping root system:** These have a central clump with multiple growing points. Many have thick fleshy roots. You may have to cut through the thick fleshy crown with a knife. You may be able to use a digging fork to pry this perennial apart. Keep at least one developing eye or bud with each division.

• **Rhizome division:** Rhizomes are stems that grow horizontally or above the soil. After lifting, cut and discard the rhizome sections one year old or older. Damaged rhizomes should be trimmed and treated or discarded if too badly damaged. Replant with the top of the rhizome just showing above soil level.

• **Tuberous roots:** For

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tubers, cut apart after lifting with a sharp knife. Every division should have a piece of the original stem and a growth bud attached. You can even store your tubers for spring planting.

• **Large, tough roots:** If the root mass is large, tight or tangled, you can raise the clump and drop it to loosen the root mass. Then you can pull apart the individual plants. Do not do this with plants that have brittle roots like peonies.

**Plant the divisions** – Never allow the divisions to dry out. Keep water nearby to moisten divisions until you plant them. It is best to plant the divided sections right away. Water well after planting and be sure and mulch.

## Dwarf Palmetto *by Derek Morris, Horticulture Technician*

The dwarf palmetto botanically known as *Sabal minor* is a much underutilized landscape palm that grows very well throughout most of NC and grows especially well in the piedmont. While it is a slow grower, it eventually will grow 3 to 4 foot high with an equal spread. Dwarf palmetto is the northernmost native palm in the US and is native to many NC coastal counties but is extremely cold hardy for a palm and will grow much northward from its native haunts. A well established specimen can easily handle minus 10 degrees F. It makes a nice unusual low growing hedge but no matter how it is used in the landscape, it will really stand out with its palmate bluish/green leaves that are particularly handsome in winter.

Palms that are at least three years old and older will produce long stalks of fragrant white blooms in early summer followed shortly by round black berries in the fall and winter. Birds, and particularly mockingbirds, are very fond of these berries on stalks that extend and arch out several feet above the foliage.

Dwarf palmetto is a very tough palm, growing in full sun or quite shaded areas. It will grow in very moist soil conditions but is also very drought tolerant once established.

While it is not known for being a fast grower, its growth can be pushed quite a lot by making sure it gets 1 to 2 inches of water per week in spring and summer and fertilizing frequently with an organic fertilize during the growing season. Fish emulsion is especially good as fertilize

and can be used as frequently as every 3 weeks to speed growth, starting in spring. Fertilizing should be stopped by September so the plant can prepare itself for the upcoming

winter. A thick organic mulch will ensure that the ground stays moist and will help with weed control. As the mulch rots over time it will further improve the soil around your palm. Mulch should be added at least once a year.

There are several varieties that have been selected over time from the wild, the most notable of these are 'Cape Hatteras' which grows much larger to 10 foot with a 6 foot spread, 'Louisiana' which is the largest growing to 12 foot with a ten foot spread and 'Blountstown' which is truly dwarf only reaching 18 inches to 2 foot tall with a similar spread. One selection found growing in Oklahoma, called 'McCurtain county', grows to the normal size but is even more cold hardy having survived minus 20 degrees F.

For something a little out of the ordinary, dwarf palmetto is a great "tough as nails" choice for the landscape whether used as a hedge, a specimen or accent plant. With its large blue green palmate leaves that are showy in any season, dwarf palmetto blends in well with



Dwarf Palmetto, *Sabal minor* under planted with purple heart at our office.

many other plants and flowers. It is particularly showy under planted with impatiens or purple heart. Dwarf palmetto also blends well with large leaved Hosta (especially Hosta varieties that lean toward yellow) or low growing ferns.



## We want YOU to be a Community Garden Mentor!

Help the Forsyth Community Garden Resource Program Impact Food Access in Neighborhoods Across Our County.

*By Mary Jac Brennan, Extension Agent, Community Gardens*

Community Gardens can be found in many Forsyth County neighborhoods and are as diverse as the people gardening in them. While community gardens have similarities in the way the gardens are set up, each uniquely reflects the gardeners' personalities. There are over 90 community gardens in Forsyth County.

Community gardening is a great tool for improving food access to individuals who may not have good garden conditions on their property and to neighborhoods that are suffering from food insecurity. Many community gardeners are gardening for the first time and need help with the basics of growing a garden. Garden groups may need help with garden organization, operation, and resources. Serving as a mentor to a community garden is one way to help improve fresh food access in Forsyth County.

Are you interested in getting involved with community gardening? Are you a gardener who enjoys sharing your knowledge? Are you concerned about improving people's access to fresh produce? Do you want to make a difference in your community? If you answered yes to any of these questions, then get involved with community gardeners who are actively solving problems together in very creative ways. Become a community garden mentor by completing the Community Garden Mentor Training program offered in early 2013.

A Community Garden Mentor is someone who is knowledgeable about gardening, enjoys sharing that knowledge with others, and has been trained to support community development around gardens. A Community Garden Mentor encourages best practices in the community garden, while providing moral support to new gardeners and their gardens. Mentors will commit to visiting their assigned garden on a regular basis during the growing season, to answer questions about gardening, to bring in the Community Garden Extension Agent when needed, and to encourage the gardeners to participate in the Community Garden Resource Program classes and activities. Community Garden Mentors are matched to gardens that will best suit schedules and personalities.

Community Garden Mentor Training classes are offered in January and February with daytime and nighttime sessions available. The classes are free and supported by a grant from the Winston-Salem Foundation. The classes

include 18 hours of mentor training in classroom instruction including the American Community Garden Association 'Growing Communities' curriculum, as well as field trips to community gardens. During the growing season, mentors are required to attend a monthly meeting with other Garden Mentors. Throughout the year, Mentors are encouraged to enroll in the 'Sustaining Community Gardens Series' and to take advantage of other classes offered by the Consumer Horticulture Program of Forsyth Cooperative Extension.

In addition to training and orientation, Forsyth Cooperative Extension provides Garden Mentors resources for their assigned garden such as seeds, starter plants (when available), access to a tool lending shed, soil nutrient testing, ongoing support during the mentorship process, and printed material on vegetable gardening, pest identification, pest management, composting, growing fruits, growing herbs, and growing flowers.

The goal of the Community Garden Mentor program is to match people who have practical, hands-on vegetable gardening experience with gardening groups in order to help support and sustain community gardens in Forsyth County. You have an opportunity to make a difference in your community. Help improve food access in Forsyth County by sharing your love of gardening with others as a Community Garden mentor.



**If you are interested in becoming a community garden mentor**, contact Mary Jac Brennan, Extension Agent for Community Gardens for an application. Phone 336-703-2850 or email at [brennamj@forsyth.cc](mailto:brennamj@forsyth.cc). Applications are also available online at: <http://forsythcommunitygardening.com/> or <http://www.forsyth.cc/CES/Gardening/>.

**If you are interested in requesting a community garden mentor for your community garden**, contact Mary Jac Brennan, Extension Agent for Community Gardens for a request form. Phone 336-703-2850 or email at [brennamj@forsyth.cc](mailto:brennamj@forsyth.cc). Request forms are also available online at <http://forsythcommunitygardening.com/> or <http://www.forsyth.cc/CES/Gardening/>.

# From the Master Gardener Hotline - Raised Beds

By *Bertram Lantz, Master Gardener Volunteer*

A woman recently called and had just moved into a new home. She wanted to know if she could start preparing for a small vegetable garden that she could plant next spring. Her lot was quite small, but there was an area on the side of the house that was in the sun at least 6 hours each day. She wanted to know if she could build the raised bed using pressure treated lumber and also wanted to know what type of soil she should use to fill the bed.

Prior to 2003, pressure treated lumber was impregnated with Chromate Copper Arsenate (CCA) and there was concern about arsenic. In 2003, EPA banned the use of CCA for consumer use and today the impregnation process is arsenic free and is safe for raised beds. It is not necessary to build an enclosure for a raised bed, but it is an easy way to keep the garden soil contained within a specified area. Three pieces of 2" x 6" x 8 foot lumber can be used to construct a small 4 x 8 foot bed. Just cut one of the 8 foot pieces in half and assemble the rectangular bed. It is best to use 2-1/2" long decking screws to hold the corners together. If the bed is not large enough, additional beds can be added in future years.

A couple of years ago, Craig Mauney, Forsyth Extension Agent and Director of the Arboretum at Tanglewood contacted Extension Agents throughout the state to get their recommendations for the best soil mix for raised beds. The recommendations were used to develop 3 soil mixes and also took a sample of Bobby Pope's mix that had been developed over an extended period of time by Pope Sand & Gravel. The soil mixes were sent to the state Lab in Raleigh and based on the results Bobby Pope's mix was chosen as the best option. Pope Sand & Gravel is located on South Stratford Road and their product is available in both bulk and packaged containers.

Once the soil is in place, a winter crop of crimson clover can be planted as a cover crop. In the spring, cut or mow the clover back and then turn the soil over. The use of crimson clover will boost the nitrogen level in the bed and add organic matter to the soil.



**How to Start a  
Community Garden**  
When: December 4, 2012  
Where: Forsyth Cooperative Extension  
Time: 6 - 8pm  
For more info:  
[www.forsythcommunitygardening.com](http://www.forsythcommunitygardening.com)

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