

# Gardening News

## Hoke and Scotland County

March 2017

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## Welcome to Gardening News



## Crepe Murder

You see it every year in the spring, Crepe Murder. What is it, why do people do it and how can you repair the damage?

Crepe Myrtles bloom on new wood. New wood is the growth that comes out each spring and summer. The reason many people hack off the tops of crepe myrtles is they think it will increase the amount of new growth and number of blooms.

### Why Not Top Crepe Myrtles:

#### *Reduced photosynthesis:*

Topping any tree results in the removal of much of the tree's canopy of leaves making it extremely difficult for tree is to take in enough nutrients through photosynthesis. The tree becomes weakened and starved for food.



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*Weak limbs:* The tree struggles to survive by attempting to grow new shoots and leaves as quickly as possible. This causes numerous weak limbs to sprout around the wounded areas. Not only are these limbs unsightly and poorly attached to the stubs, they grow very quickly as the tree attempts to replace its canopy of leaves, thereby negating the original goal of making the tree have increased blooms. In essence, the attempt backfires, with the tree regaining much of its original height, but doing so with weaker branches that pose more of a danger than the original growth.

*Sunburn:* The tree itself and the plant material under the Crepe Myrtles are now in full sun. While it may seem odd to think of a tree being harmed by the sun, the sudden exposure of previously shaded bark may damage underlying tissue. If the tree previously provided cover for shade loving plants like azaleas, those plants may be damaged or destroyed by the sudden exposure to direct sunlight. If the tree or the vegetation beneath it dies, the homeowner may have to bear the costs of removal and/or replacement.

*Ugliness factor:* While all of these are good reasons **not** to top trees, there is one more, which I'll just call the ugliness factor. Topping destroys the natural graceful structure of trees. It leaves them mangled and struggling. Instead of increasing the beauty of the landscape, topped trees detract from it. For those of us who value plants and nature, watching a mutilated tree suffer is simply painful.

*Correcting the damage:* You have two options for rehabilitating a "murdered" crape myrtle. The first method is to choose the strongest two or three sprouts from each stub and remove all of the other sprouts. This will encourage the remaining sprouts to be stronger and the canopy of the tree to be airier. If you follow this procedure for a couple of seasons, the tree is sure to be much improved in health and appearance.

The second--and more drastic--technique is to cut the tree back to within one to two inches of the ground while the tree is dormant. After two to three weeks of growth, select three to five of the most vigorous new shoots on each trunk and remove all others. Remove any new shoots that emerge later. Within three to five years, you will again have a natural-looking crape myrtle.

*Correct Pruning of Crepe Myrtles:* Follow the diagram found below for pruning young crepe myrtles. When the tree is first planted and in the first few years of growth, the main goal of pruning should be to develop a vase like shape, remove crossing, broken branches, extra trunks or suckers, branches growing towards the center of the tree and dead limbs. Generally, prune crepe myrtles in the winter.

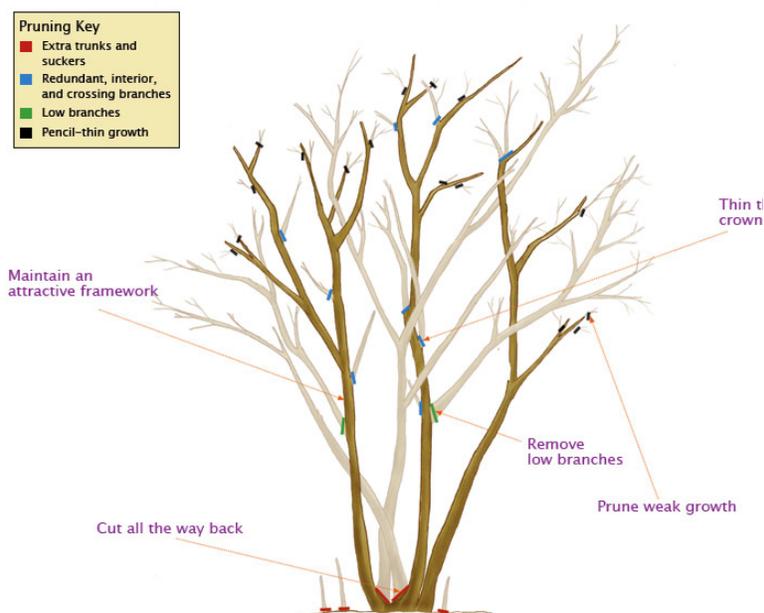
As the trees age, they should require less and less pruning. Remove all side branches up to 4 feet from the ground. A general rule of thumb when removing lower branches is to remove the lower 1/3 and leave the upper 2/3 of the branches. Crepe Myrtles are known for sprouting many suckers. Check with your garden center, there are products available to inhibit sucker growth. Follow these simple steps to protect the health and beauty of your crepe myrtle. No more Crepe Murder Please!!!

Visit these sites for videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzzNaId-XjE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ERD4IrbowE>

References: NCSU Burke Co Extension, 'Crepe Murder Revisited', University of Florida, IFAS Extension and Penn State Master Gardener articles on 'Crepe Murder'



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## Organic and Sustainable Gardening

### Choose Native Plants to Support Pollinators

**Birds, bats, bees, butterflies, beetles, and other small mammals that pollinate plants are responsible for bringing us one out of every three bites of food.**

You can be part of the movement to use ecologically beneficial landscaping practices for improving the health of our pollinators by including the use of native species in your home landscape. Many people believe honeybees are the only pollinator, but there are many others. This is not to say honeybees are not important. They are critical to our food system, but other pollinators are as important but are declining also.

Some research has indicated that native pollinators prefer to pollinate native plants. As we develop more and more land from native forests and open space, often the native habitat for native plants is lost thereby reducing pollinators food source. You can help by creating pollinator gardens or planting a few native plants. By creating a beautiful landscape with native plants, you have the additional benefit of helping pollinators find the food they need.

What pollinator plants can you plant? It depends! When looking at native plants, be sure to plant the right plant in the right place. Consider your planting hardiness zone. Visit <http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb/InteractiveMap.aspx> to determine your zone by zip code. Choose plants for your specific location. Consider sun/shade, wet/dry and soil type.

Visit <https://growingsmallfarms.ces.ncsu.edu/growingsmallfarms-pollinatorconservation/> for complete information. A great resource on this page is Debbie's list of the top 25 native plants for pollinators. Debbie Roos has spent several years studying pollinators and the list is very comprehensive.

Help save the pollinators by including native plants in your gardens.

### March Gardening Chores

**Keep Pruning:** Continue pruning fruit trees, landscape trees and shrubs. Remove dead or broken branches, crossing branches that rub another branch, and all dead and diseased wood. Also, trim flowering shrubs like Forsythia and Japanese Camellia after they bloom.

**Vegetable Garden Planting:** Follow the guidelines in the flyer 'Central North Carolina Planting Calendar for Annual Vegetables. This is an excellent guide, prepared by NC State for planting vegetable seeds and transplants. <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/central-north-carolina-planting-calendar-for-annual-vegetables-fruits-and-herbs>. Plant spring vegetable transplants of cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, potatoes and onions. Plant seeds for lettuce, carrots, beets, spinach, radishes and peas. Other vegetable and herb information can be found in the calendar referenced above.

**Last Frost Date:** Even with our unusually warm days and nights, remember our median last frost date is April 2<sup>nd</sup>. The National Weather Service collects data and presents a summary each year. The 2<sup>nd</sup> of April is based on data from 1981 to 2010. BUT, you are most likely to be sure you will not get frost from April 16<sup>th</sup> through October 17<sup>th</sup> each year. With our changing climate, keep an eye on extended forecasts and don't plant too early.

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**Ornamentals:** Prune plants that bloom on current season's growth. Divide perennials such as hostas, daylilies, sedums, salvias, mints, thyme and ornamental grasses. This is an easy way to enlarge your garden without purchasing more plants.

**Fruits and Vegetables:** Fertilize asparagus early in March before the spears begin emerging. Add a layer of compost if you have not already. As your apple, pear and quince trees begin to bloom, spray them with Agri-mycin (streptomycin) to control fire blight.

## Plant of the Month: Hydrangea

### Pruning and Colors

The general rule for pruning is to prune spring blooming shrubs after they flower and summer blooming shrubs in late winter. Think about azaleas. They bloom in the spring and then immediately set buds for next year's bloom. You have a very short time frame to trim azaleas to ensure blooming the following year. Summer blooming plants bloom on wood that grows in the summer. By pruning in the winter, you are not removing any flower buds.

Hydrangea species vary in which type of wood they bloom on, making pruning a little more challenging. First thing to know is which type of Hydrangea you have and then the rest is easy!

*Hydrangea macrophylla*- French or Bigleaf Hydrangeas



**Pruning:** Mophead and Lacecap Hydrangea bloom on old wood. Prune immediately after flowering.

**Flower Color:** Bigleaf Hydrangea's color is directly affected by pH. The pH will determine the color of the flower in most cases. Hydrangeas like 'Pink Elf' and 'Glowing Embers' can never turn blue. They may turn a purplish color. Acid soils will cause Bigleaf Hydrangeas to bloom blue and alkaline soils will cause the plant to bloom pink.

Can you change the color by adding an amendment? When you first plant, the blooms may be a variety of colors as the plant acclimates from being grown in a container to in your garden. It is possible to change the color of Bigleaf Hydrangeas, but will take time and requires very careful monitoring. Growing the plant in a

container may make it easier to control flower color. It is easier to get a flower from pink to blue, than blue to pink. Aluminum must be present for a blue color, but it must be absent to get a pink flower. The pH is important for hydrangeas to be a specific color. Take a soil sample before starting the process of changing the pH. Soil pH of 5 to 5.5 will cause flowers to turn blue, above 6.5 they will be pink and between 5.5-6.5 it will be a melding of the two colors, more like a pinkish purple. Apply aluminum sulfate or sulfur to reduce the pH to this range when you see new growth emerging in April. To raise apply lime. For complete information changing the soil pH, visit: <http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/plants/other/soils/hgic1650.html>

Personally, I'm happy with the color that our soils produce. Remember when you change the pH, you will affect all the other plants adjacent to your hydrangeas.

*Hydrangea quericifolia* -  
Oakleaf Hydrangea

Pruning: Oakleaf Hydrangea is a native plant. Oakleaf hydrangea also blooms on old wood, so it should be pruned shortly after blooming.

Flower: 4 -12 inches, erect panicles of creamy white flowers in summer; fades to pink, then tan; fragrant; good for drying

Size and Culture: 4-8 feet tall. Mulch to keep roots cool. Grow in sun to partial shade; prefers moist, well-drained soil but tolerates damp soil.



*Hydrangea paniculata*  
Panicle or Peegee Hydrangea



Pruning: Blooms on new wood, or wood grown in spring and early summer. Better blooming if cut back in late winter.

Flower: 6-8 inches, pyramidal panicles of creamy white flowers in summer on new growth; fades to pinkish rose; fertile and sterile flowers

Size and Culture: 8 to 20 feet tall. Drought tolerant; tough, dependable plant; brittle stems; easily wind damaged; can be severely pruned; rapid growth rate; this plant may be damaged by deer. Can be grown as a tree.

*Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle',  
Smooth Hydrangea



Pruning: Flower buds produced on new wood. Better bloom if cut back in winter.

Flower: The native Smooth Hydrangea is white, 6 to 8 inches, flattened corymb in summer; opens white then turns green and brown. The named cultivars have typical ball-shaped hydrangea flowers 8 to 12 inches across. Newer cultivars can be found with pink flowers.

Size and Culture: 3 to 6 feet tall. Yellowish brown fall foliage; attracts bees; leaves suffer in full sun and with drought; severely prune in early spring to rejuvenate; blooms on new wood; native to portions of eastern US; this plant may be damaged by deer.

## Name this insect.....

### Bumble Bees



In the spring, as flowers begin to bloom you often see bumble bees gathering pollen. A non-stinging insect, bumble bees are an important pollinator. These fuzzy, yellowish and black pollinators are social insects, meaning they live in colonies. Different from honeybees, bumble bees often live in nests in the ground.

Don't confuse bumble bee with carpenter bees. Carpenter bees drill into wood to make their nests. If possible, leave bumble bees to pollinate crops and wildflowers.

Honeybees are the pollinator often discussed, but bumble bees are more efficient at pollination. Because honeybees have colonies of 10,000 to 30,000, they can out pollinate bumble bees with their colony size of up to 200 or more individuals. Nevertheless, bumble bees are an important part of our pollination system.



## Name this weed.....

### Common Lambsquarter (*Chenopodium album*)

Lambsquarters is an annual wild edible. It was once thought that lambsquarters was native to Europe. However, recent archaeological studies show that the seeds were stored and used by the American Blackfoot Indians during the sixteenth century, before European trade had come to the New World.

More than likely the seeds of common lambsquarters were harvested and stored for human consumption in prehistoric times. Many members of the goosefoot family are edible vegetables, and their seeds may be dried and ground to make flour.

Lambsquarter is considered a weed because it grows in vegetable gardens, crop fields, and along the perimeter of forest land. Although this plant does not have the aggressive nature of many weeds, removing before the plant goes to seed is critical for suppression in following years. It is important to note one lamb's quarter plant can produce up to 100,000 seeds.

Hand pulling is a good option for the homeowner. Chemical control is an option if needed.



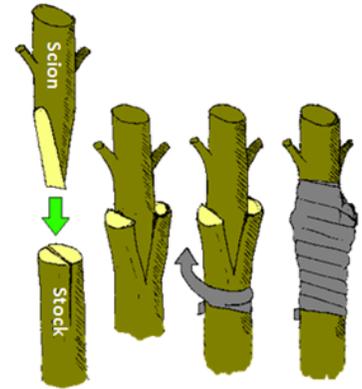
Reference: [plants.ces.ncsu.edu](http://plants.ces.ncsu.edu)

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## ABC...XYZ Gardening Vernacular

### G: Grafting-

Grafting can be traced back over 4,000 years to China and Mesopotamia. Grafting is a form of asexual or vegetative propagation. The new growth that comes from the scion will be exactly the same as the plant it came from. The rootstock will be exactly the same as the parent plant also. This is often done in tree fruits such as apples, peaches, pears and pecans. Follow this link for complete information on grafting: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/grafting-and-budding-nursery-crop-plants>



## Community Gardening Calendar

**Beginning Beekeepers Workshop, March 11, 9 a.m. – 2 p.m., Laurinburg.** To register call Scotland Cooperative Extension at 910-277-2422.

**Plant Sale, April 29** - hosted by the Hoke County Extension Master Gardener Volunteers. More information to come!

If your organization has gardening events we would be glad to list them here.

### **QUOTE:**

*“It was one of those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light, and winter in the shade.” - Charles Dickens, Great Expectations*

*We hope you find this newsletter informative and fun. Please share with a friend!*

*Send questions, comments or suggestions for articles to [shannon\\_newton@ncsu.edu](mailto:shannon_newton@ncsu.edu)*

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