

HOME GARDENER NEWSLETTER



Jackson & Swain Counties Cooperative Extension Service



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Typical circular lesions of boxwood blight

Boxwood Blight



Defoliation caused by boxwood blight

If you have boxwood plants in your yard, you've likely heard of the dreaded boxwood blight. This fungal disease is highly contagious and has no known cure, although fungicides can be used preventatively. Once symptoms are seen, it is too late to save the plant. The fungus can persist in the soil for five years or longer, and is easily spread through clothing, shoes, pruners, and newly purchased plants.

It is important to monitor your boxwoods and remove them if disease is confirmed to prevent the spread to other boxwoods on your property or neighborhood. The symptoms of boxwood blight typically include dark brown to black streaks on stems, circular leaf spots (see above), and defoliation (see left). For confirmation, samples can be sent to The Plant Disease and Insect Clinic. Your local extension agent can help collect and send the sample which will cost \$20 when submitted with their help. If homeowners send a sample independently, the cost is \$30.

Garden Activity Calendar

We're getting closer to wrapping up another year! Here are some gardening activities to make sure you end this year off right!

November Activities

Vegetables & Fruit

- Harvest winter greens.
- Remove asparagus ferns after they are killed by frost and plant one-year-old asparagus crowns this month.
- Apply lime if needed based on results of soil test.
- Grow alfalfa and bean sprouts indoors for winter salads.
- Cover fall vegetables with row cover fabric if a hard freeze is predicted.
- Sow winter cover crops, if not planted last month.
- Till up a spot for planting early spring crops as the soil is often too wet to work in February when you want to plant.
- Order fruit trees and grapevines for February planting.
- DO NOT prune fruit trees until late winter.

Flowers

- Cut back and clean up perennials after the tops are killed by frost and leave some seed heads for winter birds. Remove dead foliage from perennials and divide if needed. Apply fresh mulch over beds.
- Clean up rose beds to help reduce disease next summer.
- Plant spring flowering bulbs, perennials and pansies.
- Plant seeds for sweet peas that will emerge in early spring.

Lawns

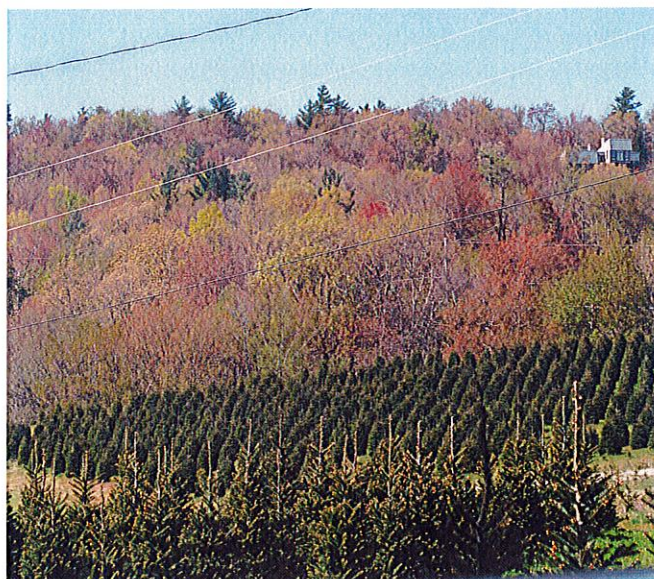
- Fertilize cool season grasses with 1 lb. of nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft.
- Apply lime if recommended by soil test.
- Mow cool season or tall fescue lawn as needed.
- Keep tree leaves from collecting in thick layers on lawn.

Miscellaneous Tasks

- Continue adding fallen, chopped leaves to the compost bin.
- Replenish organic matter in garden soil by incorporating compost and aged manure.
- If you plan to plant a living Christmas tree, dig the hole before the ground freezes.

Shrubs and Trees

- Transplant trees and shrubs.
- Water evergreen trees and shrubs thoroughly before winter sets in, particularly if weather conditions have been dry.
- Both broadleaf and needle-type evergreens can be pruned during the dormant season. Save severe pruning until late February or March. Save clippings for holiday decorating.
- Bring amaryllis bulbs out of storage for holiday blooms.
- Consider planting trees and shrubs for windbreaks around your home.



December Activities

Vegetables & Fruit

- Prepare soil for planting early spring crops.
- Cover bare soil with leaves, mulch, or cover crops until planting time.
- Cover lettuce and other tender greens with row cover fabric if a hard freeze is forecast.
- Dig carrots and parsnips. They can be left in the ground covered with 6 inches of straw to prevent the soil from freezing.
- Wait until nighttime temperatures are consistently below freezing to mulch the strawberry bed with straw for winter protection.
- Prune grapevines.

Flowers

- Apply winter mulch around perennials and roses after several hard freezes to prevent extreme fluctuations in soil temperature.
- Trim roses if necessary to reduce wind damage. Mulch roses by mounding soil 6-8 inches deep over the drafts.

Miscellaneous Tasks

- When you bring home a fresh cut Christmas tree, cut another 2 inches from the trunk. Stand the tree in water immediately and check the water level daily. Never let the water drop below the bottom of the trunk. If it dries out, the end will seal over and need to be re-cut.
- Keep bird feeders and bird baths filled.
- Clean, oil, and sharpen garden tools.
- House plants may require less water. Keep an eye out for insects.

Shrubs and Trees

- Use sharp pruners to make cuts above a bud or side branch.
- Spray cut greenery with anti-desiccant so it will hold up longer.
- Keep live Christmas trees inside no more than 7-10 days. Keep root ball moist. Plant in the landscape as soon as possible.
- Prune evergreen shrubs lightly if needed.

Ornamentals

- Begin forcing paper white narcissus bulbs.

Apple Tree Tips

Apples are synonymous with fall, and there is something magical about fresh pressed cider or a warm apple dessert. This enjoyable fruit tree requires careful maintenance, but with care and attention, you can be producing bushels of your own!

Site Selection If you're planning to plant a new orchard or a few new trees, it is important to carefully select the site. Your fruit trees will need full sun for maximum productivity in terms of color, quantity, size, and quality. It is also important to take into consideration the fluctuations in temperature of the site where the trees will be planted. If a slope is present, fruit trees should be planted in the middle of the slope, not in a valley where cold air can pool and potentially lead to spring frost damage of the tender flower blossoms.

Soil Health Another important factor to consider when planning a new orchard planting is soil health. Apples prefer soil with a pH around 6.0 to 6.5, if the soil pH needs to be adjusted, it is important to amend the soil 18 inches deep. Soil nutrients present in the soil and pH can be easily tested through a service by NCDA which is free from April to November 26th and \$4 per sample from November 27 to March 31. Soil should also be well draining to prevent root rot and other problems. You can test how well your soil drains by digging a hole that is 18-24 inches deep and fill it with water to observe how quickly it drains. If water is still present after 24 hours, there is likely a drainage issue and raised beds are recommended.

Cultivars & Rootstocks Next, an important step is determining cultivars and rootstocks that will fit your needs for your planting. Some cultivars produce apples which are better for cider, others for eating fresh, and still more for baking! There are also considerations of compatibility of cultivars for flower pollination and eventual fruit set. Some cultivars may be capable of self-pollination and production of a small crop, but cross pollination will generally lead to the best possible fruit set. Another consideration is susceptibility to disease by different cultivars and even rootstocks. Rootstocks can also control the eventual size of the full grown tree, ranging from dwarf and semi-dwarf to standard size. The best time to plant an apple tree is typically in the fall when soil temperatures are above 50 to 55°F. Young trees also require plenty of water during the first growing season for proper establishment.

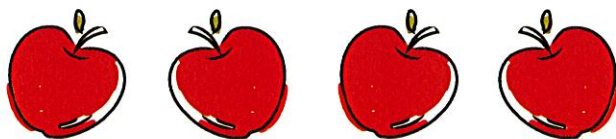


Photo courtesy of <https://apples.ces.ncsu.edu/>

Disease and pest prevention Diligent scouting is always necessary to determine if changes in plant health are occurring. Removing diseased fruit, leaves, and branches will prevent disease from spreading or becoming worse. Remember not to compost diseased plant tissue, as this may spread the problem and exacerbate the situation. A common disease of apples in North Carolina is fire blight, a bacterial disease. Preventative treatment and diligent pruning of diseased tissue is critical to preventing and reducing the impacts of this disease. It is also important to sterilize pruners in 10% bleach or isopropyl alcohol for 2-5 minutes after making cuttings to avoid inadvertently spreading this pathogen to healthy trees.

Pruning and Training Once your orchard or plantings are established, it can take several years before they begin producing fruit. It's important to be patient and still give proper attention to your young trees as they develop. Annually in late winter or early spring, dormant pruning of your trees will ensure the best possible growth and fruit production, increase airflow to prevent disease, and prevent young limbs from breaking under the stress of excess heavy fruit. Training, on the other hand, is a method of shaping your trees to reduce pruning and direct growth and is performed throughout the year through dormant pruning, summer pruning, and summer training. More information on pruning and training can be found at <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/training-and-pruning-fruit-trees-in-north-carolina>

Establishment and maintenance of apple plantings can be a rewarding and fun seasonal tradition. With proper planning and care of your trees, it is possible to be successful and have plenty of fruit to enjoy and share. More information can be found online at <https://apples.ces.ncsu.edu/> or by contacting your local extension office.

Upcoming Events

November Events

September 2-December 16 Wednesdays 6-8pm

Backyard Naturalist Program (14-Week Program)

<https://chatham.ces.ncsu.edu/2020/08/carolina-backyard-naturalist-online/>

November 10th 9:30am

Sylva Garden Club Meeting

Location TBD

November 11th 2-4pm

Veterans Day Norway Spruce Give Away

Mark Watson Park in Sylva

November 12th 7pm via Zoom?

Smoky Mountain BeeKeepers Association Meeting

November 17th 7pm via Zoom?

Jackson County BeeKeepers Association Meeting

December Events

September 2-December 16 Wednesdays 6-8pm

Backyard Naturalist Program (14-Week Program)

<https://chatham.ces.ncsu.edu/2020/08/carolina-backyard-naturalist-online/>

December 10th 2pm-3pm

Plant Chat: A virtual show-and-tell, and tip-sharing session for Jackson and Swain county home gardeners of all skill levels. Meeting ID: 917 1557 4578

Passcode: gardening

RSVP to Katie_Ashley@ncsu.edu or 828-586-4009

December 8th 7pm via Zoom?

Smoky Mountain BeeKeepers Association

December 15th 7pm via Zoom?

Jackson County BeeKeepers Association

Because things are constantly changing, be sure to check with Associations, Clubs, or your local Cooperative Extension office to determine locations and Zoom links.

Would you prefer an email version of this newsletter instead of or in addition to this mailing?

If so fill out this form: <https://forms.gle/joFwCJqmmFgQUHqg8>

Or contact Katie Ashley:



Katie Ashley, Horticulture Agent

Katie_Ashley@ncsu.edu

Jackson: 828-586-4009

Swain: 828-488-3848



JACKSON COUNTY CENTER

876 Skyland Drive, Suite 6

Sylva, NC 28779

