

Garden Thymes



North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Ashe County Center

Summer 2017

Inside This Issue

Ask An Extension
Master GardenerSM
Volunteer

Dahlias

Is A Sneeze-Free Flower
Garden Possible for
Allergy Sufferers?



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Ask An Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Ashe County Center announces the opening of the Extension Master GardenerSM information line, which will be staffed every Monday from 10:00 a.m. through 12:00 noon by Extension Master Gardener volunteers through the 2017 growing season. Home gardeners with questions about gardens, lawns or landscapes can reach an Extension Master Gardener volunteer (EMGV) to get answers on their wide ranging gardening issues by calling (336) 846-5850.

The Extension Master Gardener program is in its third year in Ashe County following the completion of two separate 40 hour training programs in 2014 and 2016. EMGVs, who work under the guidance of direction of Extension Agent Travis Birdsell, support Extension services by providing unbiased research based information to county residents. Currently there are 14 active Extension Master Gardener Volunteers and Interns in Ashe County.

To become an EMGV, individuals need a willingness to learn and share their knowledge and complete an application process. Once accepted in to the program, volunteers attend a 40 hour training program through Cooperative Extension, pass an exam and complete a 40 hour internship to earn the title of Certified Extension Master Gardener Volunteer. Once the title is earned, volunteers must log a minimum of 20 hours of volunteer service and 10 hours of continuing education annually to remain active in the program. The program will be offered again in 2018.

In addition to staffing the 'Ask an Extension Master Gardener Volunteer' phone line, EMGVs are currently involved in multiple community service and outreach projects throughout the county, the most visible of these is the Victory Garden, constructed and planted in 2016 behind the Museum of Ashe County History (old courthouse) in Jefferson.

This year's Victory Garden plantings focus on rare heirloom plants grown for generations in Ashe County which now risk extinction. "Beans were relatively easy to grow and store and provided balanced nutrition through a long mountain winter" according to Extension Agent Travis Birdsell, "We have many heritage varieties planted in this year's garden." In addition to collecting and planting these heritage varieties, volunteers are collecting the stories behind the seeds and sharing them as part of this project, which has become a living extension of the museum with a focus on celebrating and preserving Ashe County history. In conjunction with the Victory Garden seed saving project and the Ashe Seed Library, join us for an advanced seed saving techniques class at the Ashe County Public Library on Thursday, July 20, 2017 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Extension Master Gardener volunteers are active at the Ashe County Farmers Market. They support the annual Seed Swap in March as well as host several special programs during growing season. On July 15, Extension Master Gardener volunteers will offer a Plant Clinic at the Farmers Market to assist home gardeners with identifying and resolving plant disease and garden pest issues. The final program on September 23 will offer instructions and information on seed collecting.

Extension Master Gardener volunteers provide volunteer support to the Upper Mountain Research Station.

Ashe County residents interested in learning more about the Extension Master Gardener program please call the North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Ashe County Center at (336) 846-5850.



Dahlias

By: Lori Goodman
Extension Master Gardener Intern, Ashe County



If you're looking for a show stopping display of long blooming flowers with abundant foliage, consider adding dahlias to your garden. Planted as a single specimen plant or in groupings, depending on the type of dahlia you plant, they can add color to your borders or make for a fantastic backdrop in a summer garden. There are a breathtaking variety of dahlias that bloom large and small, in a rainbow of colors from subtle blush hues to brilliant pinks and reds. The different flower forms of the dahlia varieties, along with the available color options, make choosing your dahlia the most difficult part of growing them.

Dahlias are easy to grow when you understand the basics for strong, healthy plants. Dahlias grow from tubers. Plant dahlia tubers in Ashe County the same time as your summer vegetable garden, typically in late May or early June when the soil temperatures are above 60 degrees and there is no threat of frost. Dahlias thrive in sunny locations when they get 8 or more hours of full sun. Without the required sunshine, plants will have abundant foliage and fewer blooms. Dahlia tubers do not require very rich soil. They actually grow best in existing garden soil that is well drained and slightly acidic with a PH level of 6.2-6.5. Resist the urge to add additional amendments like potting soil or topsoil.

Plant your dahlia tubers horizontally, four to six inches deep, after working some bone meal into the soil. Don't add fertilizer at this stage as it may burn the tender tuber. A caveat about using bone meal! Pets are attracted to the smell. If you have a digger your tubers may be at risk. A viable substitute can be composted poultry manure.

Some varieties of dahlias can grow four to five feet tall. Because of their size and the weight of the blooms, most dahlias require staking. Rebar or strong bamboo stakes work well for this purpose. Consider putting in the stake when you plant the dahlia before you cover the tuber with soil to avoid damaging the tuber when you drive the stake into the ground. Once the plant gets tall enough to require staking, gently tie the dahlia to the stake using plant tie tape, flagging, or soft coated wire. When planting is complete don't water the dahlias until they begin to grow above ground. Average late spring rainfall is plenty to get them growing. Too much water can rot the tuber. Once the dahlias are above ground, water them deeply twice a week.

Some dahlia experts recommend pinching off the center sections of the growing dahlia once three sets of leaves are above the ground to encourage more blooms and bushier plants. As dahlias begin to grow in size, fertilize them with a low nitrogen fertilizer, such as a 5-10-10 several times during their growing cycle by mixing the fertilizer into the soil around the dahlias. High nitrogen fertilizers will result in lots of growth and foliage, but fewer flowers.

Dahlia blooms make striking floral arrangements. Cut them in the cool morning hours, place them immediately after cutting in room temperature to warm water to extend their life. Cutting blooms encourage new blooms, so enjoy them as they grow.

Although dahlias may survive a mild Ashe winter when grown near a foundation or in a protected area, to be safe you'll want to dig the tubers up after the first hard frost when the foliage turns black and the tubers have received nature's signal to store food for the winter. More on storing dahlias in a follow up article this fall.

Is A Sneeze-Free Flower Garden Possible for Allergy Sufferers?

By: Peggy Holt-Ward
Extension Master Gardener Intern, Ashe County

Yes! Did you know there are plants suitable for a "nearly" sneeze-free garden? Look for plants with low amounts of pollen that are pollinated by insects instead of wind. If a plant is wind-pollinated, the pollen is more buoyant and stays in the air longer, thereby producing the irritant.

Just a short list of less "sneezy" recommendations are Delphinium, Geraniums, Heuchera, Hydrangeas, Irises, Lobelia, Hostas, Foxglove, Blueberries, Dahlias, Daisies, Iris, Roses, and Cherry trees. Happy Gardening!

Sincerely,



Travis Birdsell
Extension Agent, Agriculture