



July 2012

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## Is Gardening for the Birds?

By Helen Munro



It is the middle of the summer with the heat of July and August

before us. The lantana is spectacular, and the birds are being well fed by either the abundance of insects, the nectar of the flowers or the plentiful seeds of the season. It is not the time when we think about the cold, dreary days of winter when birds fluff their feathers for warmth, when our gardens slumber under the cover of leaves and mulch (or even snow), or when we pour over seed catalogs looking for next year's new plant to fill a niche among the triumphant flowers of this summer.

However, it is the time to take that calculated look at your garden. Is there something blooming or interesting at all times of the year? For my garden, the flowering season starts with Mountain Pink (ground phlox), sometimes as early as Christmas. By early spring, bulbs planted in the fall thrust their green leaves upward and bloom as daffodils, tulips or hyacinths. They are soon followed by quince, dogwood, and azalea blooms. Later comes blue flag, columbine and other flowers donated by friends. This

year I had hollyhocks for the first time since I was a child. I planted just a few vinca for added color, and the lantana (Miss Huff) came back for the third year. By fall the bed that borders the back porch will be filled with volunteer impatiens that come up despite what else is planted.

Within this mix of blooms the butterflies are being well cared for. But what about the birds? In the summer, it is



the bird bath that sees the most activity. Late in the afternoon, the birds come to cool off. They splash in the water like children and raise their wings as if they are washing off the sweat of the day. The water in my water garden is too deep for the birds to bathe, but they do use it for drinking. The "ripp-it" of nearby frogs attest to the importance of the water to amphibians.

Twice I planted just for the birds or, more particular, for the bluebirds. First was a mulberry tree that was supposed to produce berries that "bluebirds love." It grew upward until the shoots towered above the roof, but it never produced the

promised berries. The second planting was a serviceberry tree. Again, I was promised blue berries for the bluebirds. Unfortunately, it was treated as a bush and trimmed. Each year it struggles to produce a few flowers and the berries are gone before I even see them. I know of places where mulberry trees and serviceberries are successful, so give them a try.

The rewards of a garden far outweigh the cost of creating that garden. You can calculate the true cost of your plants by factoring in their "color days." Just divide the number of days a plant booms by the cost of that plant. You'll find that plants such as lantana and crape myrtle provide low-cost color days while azaleas and dogwoods have a higher cost.

Gardening and caring for the birds are as much a part of my life as eating and brushing my teeth. Each year I try different plants. And each year I am surprised as a forgotten plant manages to push its way toward the sun and brighten my day.

Is gardening for the birds? Yes! And for the rest of us too.



## Monthly Gardening Activities

By Susan Strine

- Divide and transplant daylilies and irises after they finish blooming. Stop pinching back mums after the first of July. Remove spent blossoms on flowering plants to help prolong the blooming period.
- Mulch bare areas but keep mulch away from the base of a plant. Mulch will conserve moisture and help prevent weeds.
- Inspect your plants regularly for scale, aphids, mites, beetles, thrips, white flies, and bagworms. Many can be controlled by a strong spray of water or by using horticultural oil or insecticidal soap.
- Pick vegetables when ripe, and don't forget to keep the soil uniformly moist and lightly fertilized. Watering only the soil and not the leaves will help prevent disease of the foliage.
- Plant seeds for a fall crop of cool season vegetables such as spinach, beans, beets and tomatoes.
- Watch for blossom-end rot on tomatoes. This disease is caused by a lack of calcium in the soil and inadequate moisture. Stake tomatoes to keep them off the ground. This will prevent rotting of the fruit. If you haven't already done so, now is a good time to get your soil sample to the extension office in preparation for next year's garden.
- Discontinue pruning of trees and shrubs, except to remove dead or diseased plant material.
- Water lawns in early morning to lessen loss of water due to evaporation and to lessen the chance of disease. Cut grass a bit higher during dry periods so that the grass blades can shade the soil.
- Buy a rain gauge to help determine when and how much to water. Generally, one inch a week is sufficient for most lawns and gardens. Watering will also be easier if you keep a rain barrel nearby where rainwater can be captured. A small watering can comes in handy for watering small areas and container plantings.

## What's Bugging You?

By Sandy McShea



Fire ants are often a problem in our area. When researching this article, I was surprised to learn that there are native and non-native fire ants. The non-native, red fire ant, which originated in

South America, is the nuisance we most lament. Drawn to warm sunny areas, these pests form colonies in open areas, including crop land, pastures, golf courses, lawns, and play areas. They eat both plants and insects. Anyone (or thing) disturbing a colony is likely to discover that the sting of a fire ant is painful and itchy. In addition, each individual ant can sting more than once.

It is possible to control fire ant infestation but, unfortunately, eradication isn't very likely. Drenches and

baits are the preferred treatments, but they should not be used at the same time.

While mass annihilation may seem like a good idea, it is not environmentally appropriate since it will also kill beneficial and native ants.

The only good thing that can be said about fire ants is that they can be a good reminder to us of the importance of not introducing these pests into uninfected areas. Remember this when you are tempted to take your northern friends a gift of a few pots of your recently divided perennial. You wouldn't want to be responsible for assisting in the spread of the fire ant population. Rather, make sure any plants given to others are free of all pests and disease.

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## Plant of the Month: Sparkleberry (*Vaccinium arboretum*)

By Sandy McShea

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A native plant to Moore County and surrounding areas, the sparkleberry is an accommodating multi-trunked small shrub or tree that grows up to twenty feet tall. It can grow in sun or partial shade and in dry or moist soil. In the spring, it bears small fragrant white, bell-shaped flowers, which are followed by black berries into the winter. Although the berries are unappealing to humans, they serve as food for birds, and are a major component in the diet of the wild turkey. Robins, cardinals and even bluebirds are said to consume sparkleber-

ries. In addition, larva of the Henry's Elfin butterfly feed on the shiny, roundish sparkleberry leaves that are green most of the year but turn red in the fall.

Although sparkleberry is not the best choice for a formal border, it makes an attractive and beneficial addition to a casual wildlife or native garden.

***Gardening requires a lot of water —  
most of it in the form of perspiration.***

***~Lou Erickson***

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## Recipe of the Month

By Kathy Peterson RD, LDN

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Summertime means grillin' time. As a registered dietitian, I look for any opportunity to encourage consumption of more fruits and vegetables.

Grilling is an excellent way to introduce fruits and vegetables in to every meal. Fruits and vegetables are high in vitamins, minerals and fiber, and many are low in calories when eaten in appropriately sized portions. The cooking process releases natural sugars in vegetables, creating a sweeter product, and grilling adds the char-broiled flavor that everyone loves.

Sweet corn is a common and easy vegetable to grill. And better yet, it is currently in season. To get it at its freshest, buy it at a local farmers market. Once you've tried grilled corn, bet you'll want to try grilling other

vegetables such as onions, peaches, potatoes, squash, tomatoes, zucchini, and more.

### **Grilled Corn**

- 6 fresh, sweet corn ears (husks still attached)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 6 teaspoons of spreadable margarine

Fill large boiling pot with cold water. Soak ears of corn with husks attached for 30 minutes. Be sure that all husks are fully submerged in the water. Soaking the ears helps create steam during grilling and loosens the silk. Remove corn from water, pull back the husk but do not remove it. Pull off the silk from each ear, and season with salt and pepper. Fold the husks over the ear of corn. Complete these steps for the additional ears.

Preheat the grill to medium or approximately 350° F. Place ears over indirect heat on the grill. Periodically

turn the ears. Once the husks begin to brown, remove from the grill and allow to cool for five minutes before removing the husks. Spread a teaspoon of margarine on each ear of corn and enjoy!

Serving size – 1 ear  
Servings per recipe – 6

Nutrition per serving not including the margarine (all approximates): 80 calories, 1 g fat, 0 g saturated fat, 17 g carbohydrates, 3 g protein.

***Why try to explain  
miracles to your kids  
when you can just  
have them plant a  
garden.***

***~ Robert Brault***

# Gardening Questions?

Call the MGV  
Hotline

(910) 947-3188



Monday - Friday

10 am - Noon

March - October

## Moore County Farmers Market

Producer only ~ fresh and locally grown

### ***Mondays***

FirstHealth (Fitness Center)

April 16 - October 29

2 pm - 6 pm

### ***Thursdays***

Morganton Rd (Armory Sports Complex)

April 19 - October 25

9 am - 1 pm

Winter Season: November thru March

### ***Saturdays***

Downtown Southern Pines

April 21 - October 27

8 am - noon

## Sandhills Farmers Green Market

"Fresh and locally grown fruit and vegetables at a convenient location"

### ***Tuesdays***

Sandhills Community College (Aristotle Parking Lot)

April 24 - May 8 and August 21 - September 29

10 am - 1 pm

### ***Wednesdays and Saturdays***

Pinehurst Village Green Sandlot

April 24 - September 29

9 am - 1 pm



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#### Don't miss our next edition in August 2012.

For additional copies of this and past newsletter issues, go to [ces.ncsu.edu](http://ces.ncsu.edu) and search for "Dig This."

*Disclaimer: Dig This is produced by the Moore County Master Gardener Volunteers (MGV) in conjunction with the NC Extension Service. Its purpose is to share with the general public some of the MGV's enthusiasm for gardening and some of their activities. The information contained herein is based on sources that the Master Gardener Volunteers believe to be reliable, but they do not represent that the information herein is accurate or complete.*