

Horticulture Hints



Surry County Center

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Contact Us

Joanna E. Radford
Extension Agent
Agriculture & Natural Resources
(Commercial & Consumer Horticulture)

North Carolina Cooperative Extension - Surry Center
P.O. Box 324
Dobson, NC 27017

Phone: (336) 401-8025
FAX: (336) 401-8048

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Community Grant Program

The Mount Airy Media Group has established a \$250,000 grant fund from April—September 30, 2020 to assist locally owned businesses during this challenging time. To be eligible to receive funds from the grant, businesses must complete the grant application at www.mtairynews.com/grant and be approved. This fund has been established only for locally owned and operated businesses. The minimum grant match that will be awarded is \$500 per business for the eligible grant period. For more information, contact the Mt. Airy News at 336-415-4631.

Is the "Murder Hornet" a Threat?

It does not take long for social media to create hysteria. The latest is a news story circulating about the "murder hornet". The name itself causes alarm. However, upon further research, one would see that this story is talking about the Asian Giant hornet, *Vespa mandarinia*. Let's ease your mind before we get into details. This new invasive insect is not in North Carolina nor has it ever been documented to have been in our great state. The confusion comes in to play since the Asian Giant hornet looks a lot like the European hornet, *Vespa crabro*. The European hornet is found in North Carolina.



Three giant wasps, the first of which you will see in the US: (A) European hornet (Vespa crabro), (B) Asian Giant hornet (Vespa mandarinia), (C) another European hornet (Vespa crabro). Photos by Mark Borner.

The size of this hornet is enough to send most people running. Keep in mind, European hornets may exhibit aggressive behavior near their nests. As long as they are treated with some respect, European hornets are not likely to sting but they can sting, and caution needs to be

heeded. As with any bee/wasp/hornet sting, the greatest threat is for people who are highly allergic need to be careful outdoors. Regardless of whether or not you are sensitive to such stings, always be careful and watch for signs of bee/wasp activity. Use caution when approaching a wasp/hornet nesting site and be careful when working outdoors on items that have not been disturbed for some time (like piles of wood).

Getting back to the recent Asian Giant hornet frenzy, the news article is rather dated and there is no immediate cause for panic just yet. However, it is always wise to know about possible invasive insects and what to look for in case we are (un)lucky enough to get a glimpse of one. The Asian Giant hornet gets its "murder hornet" name from preying on honeybee colonies. Like most hornets, the Asian Giant hornet collects sources of meat for their protein and since honeybees are social insects living together in large numbers, it makes for quite a buffet. Their attacks usually being in mid-summer. As the hornet populations increase, they swipe a few adult workers from the front hive entrance. As the hornet colonies increase to peak, they attack the honeybee colony by decapitating most all the worker bees and then take off with all the larvae. With slim to zero worker bees and no larvae, the honeybee colony disappears.

To help deter and prevent this invasion, beekeepers would protect their hives as they do with any other wasp or unwanted guest, by using robbing screens. Much of the entrance is screened over with #8 wire mesh so that only a small gap is open and is easier to defend. NC State University Apiculturist, Dr. David Tarpy, notes that seeing the Asian Giant hornet is not in NC, the issue for beekeepers in the state is moot. But it is something to be on our radar in the future. He hopes that this is several years or decades away. Although he believes it will likely "pale in comparison to most of the more immediate problems with which beekeepers are already facing".

NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



Local Farmers Markets

The Surry County Farmers Markets are now open. What better place to get fresh, local products? In order to provide fresh, local products to customers, the market has implemented safety guidelines for the 2020 market season. In line with the North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, farmers markets will follow the same federal or state orders given to grocery stores. Therefore, the Surry County Farmers Market is working with the N.C. Cooperative Extension, Surry County Center, public officials, and Surry County Health Department to implement safety measures to help prevent the spread of coronavirus. Opening the market, provides our community access to local foods while supporting our local agriculture community.

Safety Precautions the Markets are Taking

- Vendor will wear PPE, including masks.
- Hand sanitizer will be available at each vendor booth.
- Restroom with handwashing station will be available.
- Vendor booths with two people will have one person displaying and bagging items and one person dedicated to accepting payments. Both persons will use hand sanitizer between transactions.
- Vendor booths with one person will prepackage items as much as possible. Hand sanitizer will be used between transactions.
- Vendors will accept one customer at their booth at a time.
- Vendors will accept pre-orders from customers and will be available for pick up at market times.
- There will be frequent cleaning and sanitizing of market equipment.
- Vendor booths will be separated to allow for 6 feet of social distancing.
- One-way paths will be set up for customers through the market.
- There will be no product sampling from vendors.

- No craft sales will be available while Stay at Home Order is in effect..
- Vendors who are feeling sick or running a fever will not be present at the market.

Safety Measures Customers Can Take at the Market

- Visit the market in good health.
- Utilize handwashing facilities at the start and end of your visit to the market.
- Refrain from touching your face.
- Avoid touching the produce and products you do not intend to purchase.
- Allow vendors to bag your purchases.
- Practice social distancing.
- Allow for one customer per vendor's booth at a time.
- Pre-order purchases if possible. Pre-order information will be located on the Surry County Farmers Market social media pages and updated weekly.
- Wash all produce before consumption.

Market Locations

Dobson: Thursdays, 3:30—6:30 pm
Location: 903 E. Atkins Street, Dobson

Mt. Airy: Fridays, 9:00 am—1:00 pm
Location: 111 S. Main Street, Mt. Airy

Elkin: Saturdays, 9:00 am—12:00 Noon
Location: 226 N. Bridge Street, Elkin

Many vendors are offering pre-ordering, farm, or off-site pickup. Check out the Farmers Markets' social media page at <https://www.facebook.com/Surry-County-Farmers-Market-596405117037988/> for a vendor list. This list will be updated weekly and is subject to change.

For questions regarding the Surry County Farmers Market, please email LocalFoodFarmersMarket@gmail.com.



SNAKES ALIVE

The weather is warming up and we are beginning to get calls about snakes. Some folks want to know what kind of snake they have as a guest and some want to know how to get rid of their unwanted visitor. What we need to keep in mind is that the snake is there because it has found the environment to be inviting. Snakes are looking for warmth, shelter, prey, and water. If you have these things, you should not be surprised if you find a snake in your path somewhere along the way.

Identifying what attracts snakes to your property will help in reducing the number of snakes and snake encounters. For example, snakes are attracted to hiding places, such as downed wood, pots, rocks, and other debris. In particular, piles of wood, metal, or plastic may be attractive to snakes for thermoregulation—regulating their body temperature. Snakes may use openings between rocks, bricks, or other building materials for refuge, to aid in skin shedding, or to locate prey. Snake encounters may be reduced by minimizing the presence of these structures. Homeowners can eliminate pests like rodents and insects from buildings by making entry more difficult. For example, sealing off small openings or cracks will make it more difficult for animals to enter buildings.



Eastern Rat Snake—
harmless
(*Pantherophis alleghaniensis*)
Photo by: Daniel Guinto

To deter snakes, it is best to remove any objects that may provide shelter for snakes or prey species. If you encounter a snake inside a building, it is important to properly identify

the species, to assess the risk involved. If a snake is nonvenomous, homeowners can easily remove the animal on their own with little or no risk to themselves or the animal.

Homeowners can sweep nonvenomous snakes out of a home with a broom. Alternatively, if adventurous enough, homeowners can pick up nonvenomous snakes and remove them by hand; however, there is some risk of being bitten. Thick gloves and long sleeves may be helpful in preventing a bite.

No matter how courageous you are, never try to move venomous snakes even if you are wearing protective clothing. If you are uncertain of the species of a



Family Viperidae
Copperhead—**venomous**
(*Agkistrodon contortrix*)
Photo by: Daniel Guinto

snake or you suspect it to be venomous, do not attempt to handle the snake. It is best to leave the snake alone or contact a wildlife professional if the snake does not leave. Unless you are an experienced snake handler with the proper permits, you should never attempt to handle or remove a venomous snake on your own.

Once you remove a snake from a building, it should be released onto the same property where the building stands. Snakes have distinct home ranges and moving them large distances had been shown to result in an increased risk of mortality. Also, some snakes may carry diseases, so it is important to avoid moving snakes from one location to another to minimize the spread of diseases and avoid potentially harming other snakes.

There are commercial snake repellents available, but these products can be harmful to people and pets if not used properly and have not been scientifically shown to be effective in repelling snakes. Many people question the use of mothballs to deter snakes. The use of mothballs to repel snakes is discouraged for two reasons. First, there's no scientific cause and effect evidence that it works. Secondly, placement of mothballs in the landscape constitutes a misuse of pesticides (per the EPA) and poses an ingestion hazard for small children and some animals. If you will keep things cleaned up to the best of your ability and be aware of your surroundings when outdoors, your risk of a snake bite this summer will be quite low.

While many people believe the only good snake is a dead snake, think about the importance of having a snake in the environment. Ecologically, snakes play important roles in food webs. Snakes feed on a wide variety of prey, including fish, amphibians, invertebrates, small mammals, birds, and other reptiles—even other snakes. Snakes help to naturally control these prey species while serving as food for larger mammals, birds, and fish. As both predators and prey, snakes connect food webs and maintain a healthy ecosystem.

Believe it or not, there is economic importance in snakes. Small rodents and invertebrates can cause a great deal of damage to property and crops. Snakes provide a natural form of control on these pest species. Large snakes, like eastern rat snakes (*Pantherophis alleghaniensis*), feed heavily on rodents and spare farmers from spending money on rodent control. Also, some snakes feed on insects, slugs, and grubs that may damage crops.

A good resource for specific snake information can be found at: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/snakes>

Pruning Spring Flowering Shrubs

When to prune or not to prune is often the question in a gardener's mind. It is safe to say that most all spring flowering shrubs should be pruned after

flowering. These shrubs are the ones that bloom before mid-June. The flower buds develop during the previous growing season on "old wood". If they are pruned too early, you will remove the flower buds. Some shrubs that fall in this category include lilac (*Syringa* spp.), azalea, forsythia, fothergilla, kerria, mockorange (*Philadelphus coronarius*), rhododendron, and weigela.



Fothergilla 'Mount Airy'

The best way to prune shrubs is to use the renewal method (thinning). This method involves cutting some of the largest stems of the



Kerria japonica

plant to the ground. New stems will arise from the base of the plant. This method helps to maintain the natural shape of the plant and allows more air and light to reach the interior of the shrub. Leaves begin to shed when enough light does not reach the center of the plant. Older stems often do not produce as many flowers so this will increase flowering. Do not remove more than one-third of the largest stems. This just adds unwarranted stress to the plant. The more the plant is stressed, the more disease and insect issues the plant will have. There is no need to apply a pruning paint on any for the cuts, as the wounds will naturally seal.

Some of these plants tend to grow taller than what a homeowner would like to have. Selective heading cuts can help to control the size of the shrub. This cut removes the terminal part of a stem back to a bud and can be done from one-third of the younger stems. This also helps maintain the natural shape. Resist the urge to use hedge shears to shear off all the stems to the same height. This will destroy the natural shape of the shrub.

If you have an overgrown shrub that is not longer flowering, try rejuvenation pruning in early spring by cutting all the stems back to the ground. This may delay flowering for several years but will result in a more manageable shrub. Plants that respond well to rejuvenation include, forsythia, lilac, and spirea.

So, what are you waiting for? Happy pruning!





Surry County Center
915 E. Atkins Street. Suite 300
Post Office Box 324
Dobson, NC 27017-0324

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