

Avoid Some Gardening Goofs In '94

Seed catalogs and fireworks signal the new year, but somehow I am just not ready. What happened to 1993?

A wonderful aspect of gardening is that each year you are forgiven of all (or most) of your past horticultural sins and can start with a clean slate. I have put together a list of New Year's resolutions that may help you avoid some mistakes in 1994.

■ **Keep fertilizer on your lawn or garden.**

Properly applied fertilizer on lawn or garden will not cause pollution problems. However, fertilizer that falls on the sidewalk, street or storm drain will go directly into creeks, rivers or ponds and potentially can cause eutrophication (excessive aquatic plant growth). This misapplication of fertilizer is causing terrific environmental problems. Be careful when you apply fertilizer... and that includes all types of composts and organic fertilizers.

■ **Plant and evaluate at least two species of bedding plants new to you.**

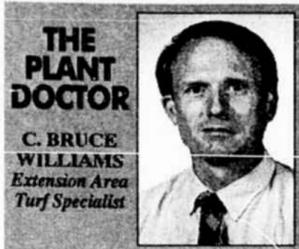
Try planting some of the drought- and heat-tolerant bedding plants that thrive in our environment. Some of these may be hard to find in garden centers, but persistent gardeners will be rewarded. Check out African daisy (*Dimorphotheca* sp.), blanket flower (*Gaillardia* sp.), Dahlberg daisy (*Dyssodia* sp.), globe amaranth (*Gomphrena* sp.), lisianthus (*Eustoma* sp.), portulaca (*Portulaca* sp.) and treasure flower (*Gazania* sp.).

■ **Use native or naturalized plants.**

Southeastern North Carolina has unique soil, water and environmental conditions. Plants that evolved in this region have the advantage over the imported exotics. In general, native plants will require less care, less pesticides, less irrigation water and result in more attractive plantings than many of the imported ornamentals.

Examples include the Southern wax myrtle, magnolia, yaupon holly, red maple and the Carolina cherry laurel.

■ **Compost all waste.**



THE PLANT DOCTOR
C. BRUCE WILLIAMS
Extension Area Turf Specialist

Composting makes sense. Do your garden a favor and establish a compost bin. Unlike the "hole in the ozone," composting organic waste is an environmental concern that everyone can do something about.

■ **Use vegetable, fruit and flower varieties with genetic resistance to pests.**

Plants have natural defense mechanisms against disease, insect and nematode infestation. These defense mechanisms are genetically controlled. In many cases the plant breeder can incorporate "genetic resistance" to pests into a plant variety. Widespread use of genetic resistance in garden plants can reduce the use of pesticides and help you grow a healthier plant.

Check with your county Cooperative Extension Service office for plant variety trial results of pest resistant plant varieties.

■ **Maintain the soil reaction (pH) at a favorable level for plant growth.**

The acidity or alkalinity of the soil (pH) is the single most important factor influencing the ability of the soil to provide nutrients to the plant. In general the ability of a plant to extract nutrients from the soil is greatly diminished when the soil pH is above 7 or below 5.5. Be aware that some plants actually prefer a slightly acid soil (like centipede grass, azaleas and hollies).

The bottom line message is that if your soil does not have the right pH then you are wasting your time and money putting on fertilizers.

See your N.C. Cooperative Extension Office, get a soil test and modify the pH of your soil.

■ **Keep trees and shrubs properly pruned.**

In the forest, nature and the "wild beasts" keep trees and shrubs pruned. A cardinal rule of pruning is to remove all dead or dying limbs from a tree or shrub. Otherwise you will be condemning your plant to a shortened life span.

Prune plants at the appropriate time of year and use the correct techniques.

■ **Use Integrated Pest Management practices and reduce pesticide use.**

The use of proper fertilizers, cultivation, pruning, yard waste disposal, variety selection and irrigation can drastically reduce the use of pesticides. Use pesticides only as a last resort.

■ **Properly maintain your lawn grass.**

You can obtain superb maintenance calendars free for all types of lawn grasses from your local Cooperative Extension Service office.

■ **Join a botanical garden or arboretum.**

Plants and people make a great mix. Gardens add to the beauty and diversity of modern civilization. Get involved with "plant loving" people for fun and fulfillment.

■ **Plant "bird-friendly" plants.**

Plants like sawtooth oak, crabapple, sumac, pyracantha, wild plum,

hawthorn, holly, nandina, American Beautyberry, dogwood, autumn olive, red cedar and Amur honeysuckle produce berries that birds love to eat.

■ **Recycle your Christmas tree.**

Christmas trees make excellent erosion control fences. In a program started by the Brunswick County Cooperative Extension Service office, Christmas trees are used for beach renourishment on Brunswick County beaches. Cumberland, New Hanover, Robeson and adjoining counties have helped the effort by coordinating their recycling efforts by sending some of their trees east. Contact your Cooperative Extension office to find out more about Christmas tree recycling projects.

■ **Have fun with your garden in 1994!**

Send your gardening questions or comments to *The Plant Doctor*, P.O. Box 109, Bolivia, N.C. 28422.



Quilt Winner

Carla Robinson (left) of Shallotte wins a sampler quilt sewn by members of the Carolina Shores Quilters Guild and donated to Lower Cape Fear Hospice for a fundraising project. She was presented the quilt on Christmas Eve by Laney Blanton (right) community relations and volunteer coordinator for Lower Cape Fear Hospice. The event brought in about \$900 for Hospice programs, Blanton said.

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DR. ROBIN LABOD

Coastline Squad Makes 86 Calls

Coastline Volunteer Rescue Squad made 86 calls during December, reports squad spokesman Sharon Martin.

Of those, 22 calls were for mutual aid to the Shallotte area, two to Calabash and one to Southport. The volunteers logged 2,484 miles.

The junior squad has been certified in cardiopulmonary resuscitation, blood-borne pathogens, hazardous materials awareness and communications. The members have been assigned and riding on the ambulances since November.

Junior squad member Todd Pruitt is making backboards for his project and certification for Eagle Scout.

This year Coastline adopted a family for Christmas. On Christmas Eve, 11 members loaded an ambulance with one set of tires, a bicycle, a router, clothing, food and school supplies, purchased with donations and through discounts from businesses, and delivered the gifts.

Also this holiday season, Santa visited the squad building for four days, talking with area children and having photographs made.

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