The Pender Gardener

Spring Plant Pick: Azalea Alternatives!

Azaleas have lots to offer to southern landscapes – including evergreen foliage and showy flowers on small to medium size shrubs, but they lack a wide adaptability to tough soil conditions such as drought, poor drainage and high soil pH. To grow well, Azaleas need part shade, good drainage and a soil high in organic matter. Many local landscapes lack these ideal conditions, causing Azaleas to struggle and eventually fail. Luckily, there are several flowering evergreen shrubs that will thrive where Azaleas falter, providing attractive alternatives for every landscape.

‘Rose Creek’ Abelia
This lovely new compact Abelia variety forms a 3’ x 3’ mound that is covered in profuse clusters of fragrant white flowers all summer. The small, shiny evergreen leaves may take on burgundy hues in winter, adding to their seasonal interest. Tough and adaptable, ‘Rose Creek’ Abelia performs well in full sun and well-drained soil. It is drought tolerant, deer resistant and can withstand a wide range of soil pH’s.

‘Eleanor Tabor’ Indian Hawthorn
Pink flowers in early summer, dark green, wavy foliage, and a mounding, 3’ x 4’ growth habit distinguish this excellent selection of Indian Hawthorn. Thriving in full sun and well-drained soils, ‘Eleanor Tabor’ also boasts excellent drought and pH tolerance and resistance to the leaf spot disease that frequently defoliates other varieties of Indian Hawthorn. Like all Indian Hawthorns, ‘Eleanor Tabor’ is moderately salt tolerant and thrives at the coast, but it is a deer favorite and should not be used in areas where deer browsing is a problem.

‘Frost Proof’ Gardenia
For a totally new look in an old favorite, try the hardy, compact ‘Frost Proof’ Gardenia! Selected for increased cold tolerance, this 4’ x 4’ variety bears extremely dark green leaves that are thicker and narrower than traditional Gardenia varieties. What hasn’t changed is the heady, sweet fragrance emitted from double white flowers that are produced throughout summer and fall. ‘Frost Proof’ Gardenia grows well in full sun or light shade and well-drained, acidic soils, and is highly deer resistant!

‘William Penn’ Barberry
The glossy, dark green leaves of this handsome 3’ x 4’ shrub form the perfect backdrop for its bright yellow spring flowers. Turning burgundy in winter, the foliage of this dense shrub is attractive in all seasons. Like all Barberries, ‘William Penn’ is spiny, making it resistant to deer browsing. This tough shrub thrives in full sun and well-drained soil, and is tolerant of drought and high soil pH.

North Carolina State University and North Carolina A&T University commit themselves to positive action to secure equal opportunity regardless of race, color, creed, national origin, religion, sex, age, or disability. In addition, the two Universities welcome all persons without regard to sexual orientation.
Disease Resistant Tomatoes

There are many plant diseases that make growing tomatoes a real challenge in our climate. A relatively new disease that has become a serious problem in the last several years is Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus (TSWV). This disease causes tomato plants to rapidly wilt and die and there is no way to treat infected plants. TSWV is spread by tiny insects called thrips. Unfortunately, thrips are very difficult to control and treating for thrips will not prevent the spread of TSWV. The main way to manage this disease problem is to plant varieties of tomatoes that are resistant to the disease. Resistant varieties are becoming more readily available to homeowners, and include ‘Amelia’, ‘Crista’, ‘Bella Rosa’, ‘Talladega’, and ‘Muriel’. Resistance to TSWV is usually indicated by the letters TSW on a plant’s tag or seed packet.

Other letters you may see on tomato plant tags and seed packets are V,F, and N. These indicate resistance to the common tomato diseases Verticillium, Fusarium, and Nematodes. Choosing tomato varieties with natural resistance to several diseases will increase your chances of raising a successful crop, but will not eliminate disease problems. There are several leaf spot and foliar blight diseases caused by fungi that can be managed by applying fungicide sprays. Alternate products with the active ingredients mancozeb, chlorothalonil, and fixed copper. Always read and follow label directions when using any pesticide.

Soil born diseases such as Southern Blight and Bacterial Wilt can be minimized by rotating crops and not growing tomatoes in the same spot each year — or by growing tomatoes in large planters. Blossom End Rot is a common disorder in tomatoes where the bottom end of the fruit turns dark and appears sunken. It is caused by calcium deficiency and can be prevented by testing your soil before planting to find out if you need to add lime. Consistent watering will also help to prevent Blossom End Rot. If your plants begin to show signs of this disorder, liquid formulations of calcium can be sprayed on tomato leaves to prevent future fruit from developing this problem.

Pender County Cooperative Extension: Helping You Grow!

The Pender County Center of North Carolina Cooperative Extension offers multiple resources to help you garden successfully and protect the environment by providing easy access to the resources and expertise of NC State and NC A&T Universities. Take advantage of the unbiased, research-based information available to Pender County residents through the following ways:

- **Pender Gardener Newsetter**
  Sign up to receive this newsletter free 5 times a year!

- **Pender Gardener Email Update**—Get weekly emails about timely gardening topics.

To sign up, email charlotte_glen@ncsu.edu and ask to be added to the Pender Gardener Email group.

- **Get Answers to Your Questions**! Extension agents and Master Gardeners can answer your garden and landscape questions and provide soil testing supplies! Contact our office by calling 259-1235 or visit us in Burgaw (office hours Mon—Fri, 8am—5pm). Questions can also be emailed to charlotte_glen@ncsu.edu.

- **Become a Master Gardener**—
  Master Gardeners are local residents who volunteer to help with Extension’s horticultural education program. Training takes place each spring. Call 259-1235 to sign up or find out more.

- **Visit our Website**! — Go to [http://pender.ces.ncsu.edu](http://pender.ces.ncsu.edu) and click on the Lawn and Garden link to access gardening information for Pender County.

- **Visit the Teaching Gardens**—
  Located at the Pender Extension Office in Burgaw, this demonstration landscape showcases plants and practices for local growing conditions. An additional demonstration site is under development at the Pender County Library in Hampstead.
ANNOUNCING:
The Farmers’ Market
At Poplar Grove Plantation
Beginning April 4, 2007
Every Wednesday, 8am—1pm
Through December 19th
This new market will feature local, North Carolina grown and handmade products including local seafood, fresh cut flowers, goat cheese, farm-raised beef and goat meats, fresh vegetables and produce, landscape and bedding plants, fresh-cut herbs, handmade unique arts and crafts, seasonal fresh fruits and berries, and more!

Join Master Gardeners at the market the 3rd Wednesday of each month to get answers to your gardening questions!

Poplar Grove Plantation is located on Hwy 17 North between Wilmington and Hampstead at Scott’s Hill. For more information, contact BJ Ryan at Poplar Grove Plantation, 910-686-9518 x 29

UPCOMING CLASSES:

Tough Plants 101
Saturday, April 21st
10am—11:30am
FREE
Pender County Cooperative Extension Center
801 South Walker Street
Burgaw

Don’t miss this opportunity to learn about some of the toughest plants for Pender County landscapes! Join Horticultural Extension Agent Charlotte Glen to find out about perennials, trees, shrubs and groundcovers that can perform under challenging conditions- featuring plants tolerant of poor sandy soil, wet areas, and resistant to deer browsing!

Call 259-1235 to sign up for this class or to find out more about it!

Sponsored by the Pender County Master Gardener Association.
All proceeds benefit Pender County Cooperative Extension’s horticulture education program!
Call 259-1235 for more information.

Plant Sale!

April 19 & 20, 9am—5:30pm
April 21, 9am—1:00pm
Pender County Cooperative Extension Center,
801 S. Walker St., Burgaw

Featuring:
A wide selection of annuals, perennials and shrubs adapted to Pender County, Japanese Maples, English planters (hypertuffa), and ‘Crista’ Tomatoes—resistant to Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus and other common tomato diseases!

Call 259-1235 to sign up for this class or to find out more about it!
Choosing the best grass for your lawn depends on several factors, including the growing conditions in your yard, your personal preferences, how much maintenance you want to perform, and the amount of traffic the lawn will receive. The types of turf grasses that can be grown in southeastern NC are warm season grasses, such as Bermuda, Centipede, Zoysia, and St. Augustine. These grasses grow from spring through fall and go dormant (turn brown) in the winter. Cool season grasses, such as Kentucky Bluegrass and Tall Fescue, grow across most of the USA except for the Southeast and Southwest where summer heat makes it unlikely these grasses will ever thrive. The following guide to warm season turfgrasses will help you choose the best variety for your yard.

Zoysiagrass
When properly cared for, zoysia makes an attractive, dense, dark green lawn. Older varieties like 'Emerald' and 'Meyer' are slow to get established and need to be mowed low (around 1") with a reel mower to look their best. Newer selections such as 'Crowne', 'El Toro', and 'Cavalier' are more vigorous and can be mowed with rotary mowers that have sharp blades. Each of these varieties must be established by sod or plugs. ‘Zenith’ is a strain of zoysia that can be established by seed sown in spring or early summer. These newer varieties of zoysia prefer to be mown low (around 1") with a reel mower to look their best. Newer selections such as 'Crowne', 'El Toro', and 'Cavalier' are more vigorous and can be mowed with rotary mowers that have sharp blades. Each of these varieties must be established by sod or plugs. 'Zenith' is a strain of zoysia that can be established by seed sown in spring or early summer. These newer varieties of zoysia prefer to be mown low, around 2"-3" and grows quickly in summer, but does not tolerate heavy wear. There are no strains of St. Augustine that can be grown from seed in our area—all St. Augustine lawns must be established from sod or plugs.

St. Augustinegrass
St. Augustine is the most shade tolerant turfgrass for our area. It has a broad blade and medium green color and is very tolerant of salt spray, though it prefers fertile soil. St. Augustine needs to be mown high, around 2"-3" and grows quickly in summer, but does not tolerate heavy wear. There are no strains of St. Augustine that can be grown from seed in our area—all St. Augustine lawns must be established from sod or plugs.

Bermuda
Bermuda is a very vigorous, highly drought and wear tolerant turf that grows well even in sandy soils. It has the highest maintenance requirement of all turf grasses, requiring frequent mowing (twice per week in summer) and regular fertilization in order to make a dense turf. Bermuda’s extreme vigor can be a problem though as it frequently grows into landscape beds and gardens. Bermuda must be mowed low, at 0.5” to 1.5”, which is best accomplished with a reel mower. There are many varieties of bermudagrass available from sod or plugs. Some varieties can be sown from seed, which establish very quickly. All bermuda varieties need full sun and are tolerant of salt spray.

LEARN MORE!
Find out more about how to care for warm season grasses by requesting a Lawn Maintenance Calendar for your turf. Lawn Maintenance Calendars are available from any Cooperative Extension Office and online from the Pender County Extension website.

PestWatch: Large Patch
Large Patch is a fungal disease that effects warm season grasses in spring and fall. It is most common in centipede and zoysia lawns that have been over watered and fertilized at the wrong time. Large Patch causes large circular patches of grass (up to 6’ across or more) to die, with a yellow halo around the outer edge. Large Patch can be difficult to control once established in lawns. Control relies on following correct cultural practices for the type of grass you have (mowing height, fertilization, irrigation), correcting any drainage problems, NOT irrigating in fall and spring except during extended drought, NOT fertilizing before June 1 or after Sept. 1, controlling thatch, and applying fungicides in spring and fall. The following products can be used to treat Large Patch: Banner Maxx, Cleary’s 3336, and Bayleton. Other insect and disease problems can cause similar symptoms—have all problems properly diagnosed before using any pesticide. Read and follow all label directions when using pesticides.
Planting for Success!

Spring is the time when many peoples’ minds turn to planting! Make sure you spend your time and money wisely this year by doing a little research before hand to ensure you choose the right plant for your site. In order to choose the right plant for your growing conditions, consider all of the following when picking plants for your landscape: the amount of sun or shade the site receives, exposure to salt spray, drainage and soil type, the possibility of deer damage, and the mature size of the plant compared to the space available to grow. The following suggestions will help you begin a new season of successful planting!

**ANNUALS**

In southeastern North Carolina we can expect our last frost sometime during the first two weeks of April, making mid-April a safe time to start planting warm season annuals and vegetables. Annuals are extremely useful for adding bright spots of color to the landscape, but in areas with hot, humid summers many annuals have a difficult time keeping up a show all season. Tough, heat loving annuals that provide flower power all summer include ‘Profusion’ and Creeping Zinnias, Melampodium, Cigar Plant (*Cuphea*), Annual Vinca, Wave Petunias, Mealy Cup Sage, Scaevola, Pentas, and Lantana. Heat lovers that produce showy color all season with their foliage include Coleus, Perilla, Persian Shield, Sweet Potato Vines, ‘Purple Knight’ Alternanthera, and Purple Fountain Grass.

**PERENNIALS**

Perennials come back year after year, providing a changing palette of color and interest throughout the growing season. Some perennials only live a few years but produce lots of seedling to take their place. Examples include Columbine, Tickseed Coreopsis, Gaura, Gaillardia, and Hollyhocks. Others, such as Baptisia, Blue Star (*Amsonia*), Crinum Lilies, Daylilies, and Iris can live 50 years or more! Deadheading (removing old flowers) promotes longer flowering. Some naturally long blooming perennials include ‘Goldsturm’ Rudbeckia, False Red Aloe, ‘Miss Huff’ Lantana, ‘Matrona’ Sedum, Hardy Ice Plant, and Purple Coneflower.

Choosing plants for wet or dry sites can be a challenge. Great perennials for wet spots include Cardinal Flower, Hardy Hibiscus, Japanese Iris, Swamp Milkweed, Rain Lilies, and Joe Pye Weed. Perennial beauties for dry places include Arkansas Blue Star, ‘Miss Huff’ Lantana, ‘Bath’s Pink’ Dianthus, Mexican Bush Sage, and Hardy Ice Plant.

**EVERGREENS**

Evergreens lend structure and stability to a landscape. They are often used to create a backdrop for more colorful plants, to screen unwanted views, and create structure. Most evergreens produce small flowers that go unnoticed, but not all - Camellias, Indian Hawthorn, Tinus Viburnum, Loropetalum, Azaleas, Abelia, and Gardenia are all exceptions! Some tough, fast growing evergreens for screens include Wax Myrtle, Japanese Cedar (*Cryptomeria*), ‘Green Giant’ Arborvitae, Ligustrum, and Anise Shrub.

Most evergreens dislike wet feet. A few that can tolerate being a little on the wet side include Inkberry Holly, Atlantic White Cedar, Anise Shrub, American Holly, and Leucothoe. Great low growing evergreens include Dwarf Yaupon, ‘Carissa’ Holly, ‘Gulfstream’ and ‘Firepower’ Nandina, Dwarf Pittosporum, Indian Hawthorn, and Sarcococca. Many people have learned the hard way that deer like to eat many of our more popular landscape shrubs. A few evergreens that deer do not prefer to eat include Rosemary, Gardenia, ‘William Penn’ Barberry, Chinese Hollies, Chinese Junipers, and Plum Yew (*Cephalotaxus*).

Learn More!

For more plant recommendations specific to our area visit the Pender County Cooperative Extension website at [http://pender.ces.ncsu.edu](http://pender.ces.ncsu.edu). Click on the Lawn & Garden link to access lists of annuals, perennials, ornamental grasses, groundcovers, vines, shrubs, trees, salt tolerant plants, and deer resistant plants for southeastern North Carolina. Copies are also available from the Pender County Cooperative Extension office by calling 259-1235 or visiting us at 801 South Walker Street, Burgaw (Mon—Fri, 8am—5pm).
For recommendations of more plants that thrive in Pender County, logon to the Pender County Cooperative Extension website at http://pender.ces.ncsu.edu.

Click on the Lawn & Garden link to access lists of hundreds of plants recommended for local growing conditions.

Extensive gardening information for NC, including thousands of plant fact sheets with images, is available from the NCSU Urban Horticulture website at: www.ncstate-plants.net

Azalea Alternatives

‘Bonanza’ Camellia
This dwarf, mounding selection of Camellia sasanqua produces burgundy-rose double flowers in fall and grows 3’-4’ tall and 4’-5’ wide. In general, Sasanqua Camellias are more tolerant of sun and drought than Camellia japonica varieties, have smaller leaves, and are less formal in appearance. ‘Bonanza’ Camellia will thrive in sun to part shade and well-drained soil. ‘Chansonette’ is another low growing Sasanqua Camellia, producing rose-pink double flowers in autumn.

Florida Anise
Florida Anise, Illicium floridanum, is a perfect shrub for shady sites with moist to wet, acidic soils. The glossy dark green foliage of this large, 6’ to 10’, shrub is reminiscent of Rhododendron, while the dark red, waxy, star-like spring flowers are truly unique and attractive. Compact varieties reaching 5’-6’ are available, such as ‘Head-Lee Compact’, as well as a variegated, pink flowered form named ‘Shady Lady’. The aromatic leaves of all Illicium varieties are avoided by browsing deer.

More Shrubs for Moist Sites
Florida Anise is one of the few evergreen shrubs that tolerate wet soils. Inkberry Holly (Ilex glabra) is another evergreen tolerant of moist to wet soils, though it does not produce showy flowers. Some deciduous flowering shrubs that tolerate poor drainage include Fothergilla (Fothergilla gardenii and Fothergilla major), Summersweet (Clethra alnifolia) and Virginia Willow (Itea virginica).

Find more plant recommendations for Pender County online at http://pender.ces.ncsu.edu—click on the Lawn and Garden link on the left side.