Pollinators have been in the spotlight for many years for good reason. Their numbers have been in decline for quite some time. They need our awareness and support to help them increase their populations.

There are so many ways that pollination occurs, but most of which require some other life source to accomplish. Honey Bees, Bumble Bees, Wasps, Carpenter Bees, Beetles, Moths, Birds, Flies, Bats and Butterflies are all extremely important to carry out this mission. The loss in numbers of so many insects has really created heightened concern. They are a critical link in the food chain directly and indirectly affecting us. Pollinators are tremendously important in maintaining biodiversity and environmental health.

The decreased numbers of both domesticated bees and native pollinators is in direct relationship to many of our current landscaping and gardening practices. The loss of natural habitat by development, increased disease pressure affecting both non-native and native pollinators and our miss-use of many pesticides are all contributing factors. We can improve populations of these pollinators by reducing our use of pesticides, protecting their natural habitats and creating areas in the landscape that supply their daily needs.

This past fall semester the students in our design 1 class each designed a pollinator garden to be considered for installation in the Sandhills Horticultural Gardens. The circle area in front of the Ball Visitors Center is the chosen site. During this design process we all researched and discovered the many needs and diverse relationships pollinators require for a healthy ecosystem.

The selecting of plants that provide both nectar and larvae feeding sources as well as habitat and housing needs was investigated and incorporated into their garden designs.

The use of native plants in your design choices will not only add beauty to the garden but also help increase important habitats for our many native pollinators. Native plants have evolved along with our native pollinators. These pollinators have adapted over hundreds of years to seek out specific flower types to support their life cycle. Many of the non-native plants we typically use simply do not provide this symbiotic relationship. We can help support them by protecting the natural habitats in our gardens and planting more natives as well.

Bees are the most important pollinators due to their need for flowers for all their food sources. The nectar and pollen collected are both used for their survival and to feed their next generation.

Some of the 4000 native bees are social in their nest building like honey bees while 75% of them are solitary nesters.

These are some of the things to consider in your design of a pollinator habitat.

- Use more native plants
- Have a diversity of plants for a long season of blooms available
- Bigger groups of the same plant for easier foraging
- Provide specific host plants for caterpillars to feed on
- Restrict most pesticides and herbicides
- Leave areas in the landscape natural and undisturbed
- Leave things less cleaned up, old logs, stumps, and brush
- Water sources available, a low dish with slanted sides and pebbles

All of us can do more to help protect and encourage pollinators in our outdoor spaces. We will be rewarded in more ways we can count. It’s a vital part of our own existence. We can truly have a positive impact.

“Bee Wise, Bee Considerate, Bee Aware, Bee Healthy”
Fruit Tree Care

Johanna Westmen

Many of us, here in the Sandhills, have embraced the love of growing fruits in our own landscapes. I personally have jumped on the bandwagon by planting three new fig tree varieties to our existing fig tree collection. Types of fruit trees that can be planted here include peach, apple, plum, pecan, fig, and pomegranate. In fact, all of these particular fruit trees are planted in the vegetable garden of the Sandhills Horticultural Gardens.

Planting fruit trees can be relatively easy as long as you can meet certain requirements. Probably the most important consideration for planting fruit trees is the need for at least 6-8 hours of full sun. The majority of the fruit trees we plant in the Sandhills will require full sun for fruit production. Depending on the type of fruit tree, your soil may have to be amended to meet the requirement of the tree you are trying to grow. We all know that peach trees grow very well in our sandy soil without much amending but you may have to do a little research on other types of fruit trees to be sure they will be successful in the soil you are working with. The type of soil will affect how much watering you do to keep your tree healthy and active.

Another consideration when choosing fruit trees are their ‘chilling hours’ requirement. The chilling requirement of many fruit tree varieties is the minimum period of cold weather after which a fruit-bearing tree will blossom. It is often expressed in chill hours. The traditional definition of a chill hour is any hour under 45 degrees F. When choosing your variety you should try to choose one that has 300 chill hours or less. There’s nothing wrong with choosing one with a higher chill hour requirements, just know that it can affect whether or not your tree will produce fruit.

Another very important part of fruit tree care is their annual pruning. Here in the gardens, the majority of the pruning happens in the winter. Usually anywhere between January and March is the goal we set to handle all the dormant pruning needed. A great rule of thumb to follow is this - you should prune the latest blooming trees first and the earliest blooming last! In our case we prune our apples and pears first then follow with our peaches and plums. Your primary objective when training and pruning fruit trees is to develop a strong framework so that the tree will support fruit. You can always prune to remove any dead, diseased or broken limbs anytime during the year. Depending on the type of fruit tree you have, you can be pruning for a central leader as the case of apples, pears, pecans or plums. This is a very specific type of pruning characterized by one main, up-right trunk referred to as the central leader. The shape of a properly trained central leader tree is said to resemble a Christmas tree form. The lowest branches (scaffold) will be the longest and the upper branches will progressively become shorter so that you can allow maximum light into the entirety of the tree. If you are growing peaches, plums or nectarines you should be pruning with an open-center. Sometimes termed vase training. This type of pruning creates an open-center system. With the leader removed, it leaves a ‘vase shaped’ tree with an upright growth habit. You may have seen this type of pruning performed on the many peach trees we have here in Moore County. Regardless of the type of pruning and training system needed for your fruit tree, it can be one of the most important when it comes to fruit production so it should definitely not be overlooked.

Depending on your tolerance for insects and disease, you should know that fruit trees have quite a few issues that may require your attention if you are hoping for unblemished perfect fruit. You will need to do some research regarding the pest problems these trees can attract and then make decisions on how you want to control them. Unfortunately, insects and other vertebrate animals like our trees as much as we do so it can become a continual battle. Just know that if you decide to treat your trees with a pesticide, be sure to read the label regarding the safety and use of the chemical. There are many chemicals that should not be sprayed when bees are active. Many of the pesticides now include this on their label. Just as important, be sure to protect yourself from any drift or contact. Always, always read the label!

Enjoying the ‘fruits’ of your labor when caring for fruit trees is definitely one of the perks involved when planting and growing them. Its definitely one that I have come to enjoy more and more each year!

Spring Garden Tips

- Prepare irrigation systems for the new growing season
- Renovation pruning should be done in the early Spring
- Plant cool season vegetables in late February to early March
- Plant your warm season vegetables after threat of frost
- Cut back and clean up both herbaceous perennials and ornamental grasses before new growth begins
The Sandhills Horticultural Society was pleased to offer a new event this past winter in the Hoad Children’s Garden called “Santa in the Gardens”. WOW was it ever an amazing success! On a beautiful Sunday afternoon in November close to 100 kids visited with Santa and Mrs. Claus. They enjoyed making reindeer food, face painting, storytelling and refreshments. This was a wonderful opportunity for families to get into the Christmas spirit while enjoying all that our beautiful gardens have to offer. In December Maggie Smith graced us with wit and talent while teaching 21 attendees how to make Christmas wreaths and swags with fresh greenery. In January, Extension Agent Taylor Williams held his pruning workshop where 75 attendees learned the basics of pruning and how to not “murder” their crapemyrtles.

For Spring we have an exciting lineup of speakers and workshops. Sign up early. Most workshops have limited space requirements.

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**Horticultural Society Events & Workshops**

*Tracye Reiland*

Register by emailing landscapesgardening@sandhills.edu or calling 910-695-3882

**Lunch & Learn**

**March 14 (Thursday) Noon to 1PM – Ball Visitors Center**

*The Behavior and Control of Moles and Voles*

Tommy Rains from Cape Fear Wildlife Control and co-presenter Eddie Tighe will discuss how to manage these pesky creatures in your yard and landscape. FREE – bring your lunch, the Gardens will provide drinks.

**Micro Gardening: Food Farming in Containers & Small Spaces**

**March 25 (Monday) 9AM to Noon – Ball Visitors Center**

Kathy Byron, Director of Good Food Sandhills, will show you ways to manage veggie garden challenges by growing food in small spaces. Learn the basics of vegetable gardening and how to use permaculture principles. To start your micro garden you will take home a grow bag planted with potatoes and create a herb Softpot as Art in the Garden. Horticultural Society members $15, non-members $25.

**Growing Tomatoes in the Sandhills**

**March 29 (Friday) 1PM to 2PM – Ball Visitors Center**

Craig LeHoullier, the North Carolina Tomato Man, will be speaking on growing tomatoes in the Sandhills and the dwarf tomato project he is leading. He’ll tell us about the wide variety of tomatoes he grows in earth bags and straw bales. He will have handouts and seed packets for attendees. This FREE program is sponsored by the Sandhills Horticultural Society and Sandhills Council of Garden Clubs.

**Design Your Own Stained Glass Mosaic Mirror**

**April 4 (Thursday) 10AM to Noon – Ball Visitors Center**

Diane Flanegan from ARTworks in Vass is bringing one of the most popular classes to the Gardens. This would make a lovely gift for Mother’s Day. All supplies and tools will be provided. Horticultural Society members $40, non-members $50.

**Upcoming Events . . . March, April & May**

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**Lunch & Learn**

**April 10 (Wednesday) Noon to 1PM – Ball Visitors Center**

*How to Become a Backyard Beekeeper*

Pat and Larry Brannon, certified beekeepers and owners of Brannon Apiary will discuss how to start your own bee apiary. Flowers that attract honeybees and basic bee anatomy will be covered. They will also discuss some barriers you may encounter. FREE – bring your lunch, the Gardens will provide drinks.

**Sandhills Horticultural Society Spring Plant Sale**

**April 13 (Saturday) 8AM to Noon – Steed Hall**

Perennials, woody plants and bulbs will be for sale. For information or to pre-order call 910-695-3882. Horticultural Society members receive 5% off orders of $100 or more.

**Annual Bedding Plant Sale – Benefits Student’s Field Trip**

**April 26 (Friday) 2PM to 5PM, April 27 (Saturday) 9AM to Noon – Steed Hall**

Annuals, herbs, tomato and pepper plants are available. Pre-orders are recommended. Deadline for pre-orders is Friday, April 12. Order forms are available at the Ball Visitors Center and Steed Hall. Call 910-692-3882 for more information.

**Botanical or Lace Impressed Pottery Platters**

**May 2 (Thursday) 10AM to Noon – Ball Visitors Center**

ARTworks of Vass is back with Maegan Lea of Fickle Pottery. Participants may bring their own botanicals or lace or choose from what Maegan provides. All supplies and tools are provided. To allow time for drying, glazing and firing your project will be ready by June 3. Horticultural Society members $50, non-members $60.

**Annual Bedding Plant Sale – Benefits Student’s Field Trip**

**May 20 (Monday) Noon to 1PM – Ball Visitors Center**

**STARworks** – Joe Grant, glass studio director, will discuss their organization and the educational, residency and internship programs offered. FREE – bring your lunch, the Gardens will provide drinks. off orders of $100 or more.
As I sit down to write this article, it is early February and I’m in the midst of contemplating all of the late winter pruning that is on my “to do” list here in the gardens and at home. This task brings to light one of my favorite landscape plants, Hydrangea paniculata or Panicle Hydrangea.

I know that when you hear the name Hydrangea most minds go directly to Hydrangea macrophylla or Bigleaf Hydrangea. While these are spectacular, they do not make my heart sing like the Panicle Hydrangea. Panicle Hydrangea is not a name that we hear often. They are more commonly referenced by their cultivar name. Popular cultivars are ‘Limelight,’ Little Lime®, and Quick Fire® to name a few.

You’re probably wondering why I think these are so special. Most of them are large, bold flowering shrubs. They bear an extra-large cone shaped panicle of showy sterile flowers. These beauties tolerate full to partial sun. They also appear to be tolerant of a wide variety of soils. The cultivars in my garden live quite well in poor soil with no irrigation and limited hand watering. They bloom on new growth, so they can be pruned hard in late winter to control size. Last but not least, deer may sample them, but do not feast on them.

I would particularly like to highlight the pruning. Throughout my career, I have been asked time and time again why someone’s Bigleaf Hydrangeas fail to bloom. The answer for this is typically two-fold. Bigleaf Hydrangeas bloom on old wood, meaning that buds are formed the previous season. If you fail to prune them immediately after flowering, you risk removing flower buds. The other reason is our North Carolina weather. Bigleaf Hydrangeas perform best when we have consistently cool winter temperatures. When we experience our sporadic warm-ups (I refer to them as false springs), the buds begin to awaken and swell. When the subsequent cold snap happens a week later, those buds are often damaged. They can be damaged to the point of death. When this happens you will often see Bigleaf Hydrangeas sprout from lateral buds deeper in the plant. Unfortunately, these buds are vegetative only and will bear no flowers. Panicle Hydrangeas are much more forgiving. The attribute of blooming on new wood is a NC gardener’s friend!

In my own garden I have a large specimen of ‘Pink Diamond.’ This beauty blooms every June without fail. It is currently about 10 feet tall by 8 feet wide. In late February to mid-March, I will essentially reduce its size by half. When it flushes out in spring, it will rebound wildly. Creamy blooms appear in late June. These blooms will then fade to a rosy pink and then golden brown as they age and persist on the plant.

If you choose cultivars wisely, you manage to have one in bloom most of the summer. ‘Tardiva’ is the cultivar that started my love of this plant. This giant beauty gives a show in August, when so many flowering plants are shrinking away from our oppressive heat and humidity. Once in flower, it is abuzz with pollinators in every shape and size. Have I convinced you yet? I hope that you will give Panicle Hydrangea a try in your garden.