



Sandhills
Horticultural Gardens

The Bloomin' News

Sandhills Community College

Vol. 16, No.1

Spring 2022

*The Sandhills Horticultural Society - dedicated to the support of the Sandhills Horticultural Gardens since 1987.
Please help the Gardens grow by becoming a Society member.*

Snakes in the Garden

Jim Westmen

For some people, the simple phrase above is enough to send panic and terror through their body. I hope to expel a lot of the myths and apprehensions that some people have when it comes to dealing with snakes that can be found in the everyday garden.

Even in our own Sandhills Horticultural Gardens we deal with snakes. Snakes, both the poisonous and non-poisonous, exist in our gardens. My goal is to educate our students so that they can recognize the difference.

Whenever a snake is found in the garden, I try to encourage the students to first identify the species, rather than react with the old adage, "the only good snake, is a dead snake". We teach our students in our Pest Management Class that the first step in dealing with a pest problem is to first identify the pest because just like insects which can be helpful, there are snakes that can actually be beneficial to your garden. One way you can help identify any snakes found in your garden is to have a snake identification book. There are many books out there but my favorite and the one we have here in our department as well as in my own book collection is *The Audubon Society Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians*. This book has wonderful information as well as great pictures for identification. There are also loads of information and pictures on the internet as well. Snakes can have different markings on them when they are juvenile than when they become adults so identifying them becomes even more critical

Some of the beneficial snakes we often encounter in our gardens are black snakes, garter snakes, hognose snakes, king snakes and northern water snakes. There are many others but these seem to be the most recurring ones for us. All of these snakes hunt prey

to eat; therefore they could definitely be a beneficial creature in your garden. Many have diets that consist of rodents so you do not have to worry about your vegetation being eaten. Probably the most worrisome of the above mentioned would be the Northern Water Snake as his diet usually consists of fish. This could definitely be a problem in your water garden, especially if you like to raise Koi in your pond. This is the one snake that most people get confused with

the Water Moccasin. The Northern Water Snake, however, is not venomous. The most important identifying feature of this non-venomous snake is the shape of the head. Non-venomous snakes do not have a triangular shaped head, as do venomous snakes. The other identifying feature would be the markings on his body, this is where your snake identification would be very helpful, especially ones with photographs. But as I have encountered, they are known to strike at you if you corner them. The Kingsnake



Northern Water Snake

is a snake that eats other snakes, including venomous ones. They have also been known to eat lizards and rodents as well. My first encounter with a Kingsnake was in my own garden and at the time he was swallowing a Copperhead snake. Needless to say, I had no problem letting him coexist with me and my family. Identification of a Scarlet Kingsnake is very important as it has very similar coloration to a Coral Snake, which has the second most potent venom behind the rattlesnake. The rhyme "red on yellow, kill a fellow; red on black, venom lack" can be important if you were to run across a snake which had a tri color pattern of black, red and yellow bands. Once again, stressing the importance of identification of all snake species.

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The Southeast is home to many different species of snakes and yes there are ones that are venomous as well. In the approximate forty-five species of snakes found in the southeast, there are six that are actually poisonous. Even the Sandhills Horticultural Gardens are not immune to these types of snakes. The most common venomous snake we encounter would be the Copperhead Snake. This is a relatively small snake but venomous still the same. We have encountered this particular snake on occasion in the gardens here at Sandhills. As a matter of fact, studies have shown that snake populations are declining in numbers in the Southeast as well as worldwide. Factors such as loss of habitat, high mortality on roads and pollution are contributing to their decline in numbers. Even persecution from humans from a lack of misunderstanding or knowledge regarding snakes has contributed to their decline. So the next time you see a snake in your garden take some steps to identify and learn about the species before you automatically grab the shovel to eliminate it. Who knows, perhaps he/she can be of assistance to you in maintaining that beautiful garden you work so hard for.

Weather and Blooms

Johanna Westmen

I get a lot of questions during this time of the year as to why a particular plant did not produce abundant flowers. There could be a myriad of reasons why this happened. Sometimes it is as simple as an incorrect pruning practice or an infertility problem. We know that some cultural practices such as light, fertility and pruning can be controlled by the gardener; however, we cannot control things such as age or weather.

Weather, particularly cold weather, is one of those factors that can have a huge impact on flowering. If we experience colder than normal temperatures, there is a good chance that flower buds can be killed or damaged. Either one of these situations can cause a flowering plant to produce no flowers at all. I have seen many cases where the buds on forsythia have actually been killed due to unusually low temperatures in the winter. Another problem comes from late-spring cold snaps.

I am sure many of us have seen this happen with flowering plants in our own garden. Even though these plant materials are cold hardy when dormant, the flower buds can become subject to frost damage, especially as their protective bud scales start to separate and expose the more susceptible flower parts such as the petals. It seems that every year the



native wisteria, which my husband has crazily planted but keeps pruned into a tree form specimen, is hit by a late spring cold snap and does not bloom. In cases like this, sometimes it is good to look for a plant with a later bloom time. This can protect it against the late spring cold snaps. There has been a lot of plant breeding done in certain varieties of forsythia and wisteria to help us offset the problem.

On the other end of the spectrum, we can actually have a winter where we did not get enough cold weather to influence the blooming. This can be evidenced with many spring-flowering bulbs such as tulips. This is why we treat tulips as annuals in the gardens at the Sandhills. Any tulips that are planted here are pulled up after they have bloomed and replanted again in the fall to ensure blooming. Other plants such as lilacs have this problem as well. They need a prescribed period of cold to set flowers.

We have talked about cold weather but we haven't discussed warm weather and the detrimental affect it can have on blooming plants. We will leave that for another article. Just know that there are certain things we can control in our garden, but weather is definitely not one of them. As gardeners, we take the good with the bad. If your blooms have been affected this spring by this past season's cold temperatures, let's just hope that the insect problem has also been affected in the same way! Happy gardening and here's to an early spring full of beautiful blooms and bountiful gardens.

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Horticultural Society Talks & Workshops

Tracye Reiland

“Where flowers bloom, so does hope.” – Lady Bird Johnson. I believe this sentiment perfectly captures the essence of our beautiful gardens that you so graciously support. I have hope that as the seasons move forward, we can put the program interruptions of the past two years behind us and frequent the Gardens to enjoy the beauty, peace, and fellowship they offer. I also hope you enjoy our spring lineup of talks and workshops. As always, we welcome any suggestions you have for future events.

Upcoming Events at the Ball Visitors' Center...

Registration required for all events.

To register for workshops & classes please call 910-695-3882 or e-mail at landscapegardening@sandhills.edu to reserve a space. If you call, please leave your name, phone number, and mailing address.

All events are free unless noted. If your workshop requires a fee, please send your payment with the name and date of workshop to: **Sandhills Horticultural Society, 3395 Airport Road, Pinehurst, NC 28374.**

A portion of the workshop fee goes to support the Gardens.

Pruning Talk and Demonstration

March 1 (Tuesday) 10:00 AM – Noon

Moore County Cooperative Extension Agent Savannah Laur will discuss the dos and don'ts of pruning and provide guidance on pruning techniques. Weather permitting, she will provide an outside demonstration of how it's done. You will leave feeling more confident when it's time to pull out your pruners!

Tree Grafting Workshop

March 14 (Monday) 9:00 AM – Noon

After teaching a class on the ancient art of grafting to the SCC Landscape Gardening students, we decided to invite Leanne Kenealy Atkins back to give our SHS members the same opportunity. In this workshop, you will learn the simple grafting techniques that have been practiced for over 4,000 years to produce better wine, olive oil, and various fruits and how to demystify one of the most interesting types of plant propagation. The methods taught can translate to any plant, but this workshop will focus on the majestic and ancient Bald Cypress, *Taxodium disticum*. The class fee covers instruction and supplies to graft up to 4 Bald Cypress rootstocks. Class size is limited to 20. Members: \$40, Nonmembers: \$50. We may add another class in the afternoon if interest is strong.

Growing Plants in Containers

March 25 (Friday) 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Hilarie Blevins presents the latest talk in the Sandhills Horticultural Lecture Series. Whether you grow all your plants in containers or only one or to special plants, you'll learn new ideas and techniques. This program is sponsored by the Sandhills Horticultural Society and Sandhills Council of Garden Clubs.

Hydrangea Painting Class

April 8 (Friday) 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Paint on a framed 16x20 screen using specific tools to create a lovely textured hydrangea floral design. This artwork will look amazing inside your home. All supplies will be furnished. Class size is limited to 12. Members: \$70, Nonmembers: \$75.



SHS Spring Plant Sale

**April 9 (Saturday) 8:00AM-9:00AM Exclusive for SHS members
9:00AM – Noon – Open to the Public**

The Sandhills Horticultural Society will hold its spring plant sale offering perennials, woody plants and bulbs. Due to construction, the sale will be held in the Homer Parking Lot (adjacent to the baseball field, behind campus). There are no pre-orders for this sale. Cash or check only. SHS members receive a discount on orders of \$100 or more.

Chocolates in time for Easter!

April 12 (Tuesday) 11:00 AM – Noon

Meet Scott Hasemeir, owner of V Form Chocolate, Pinehurst and observe how he makes his delectable creations. He will also have chocolates to purchase for your Easter baskets or just to treat yourself!

The Importance of Soil Testing

April 19 (Tuesday) 11:00 AM - Noon

Deborah Branson, PhD, CDR (USN Ret), Master Gardener and local farmer will speak about how we can make our soil here in the Sandhills more productive. She will cover the basics of soil testing, including why it's important, how to do it, when to do it, how to interpret the results and steps after that.

Paint Pouring with ARTworks Vass

May 10 (Tuesday) 10:00 AM -1:00 PM

Join Laura Scott to explore the many facets of Paint Pouring. Color, composition, and technique will all be discussed before the pouring begins. You will have the opportunity to finish one 12 x 12" canvas for \$39, two for \$59, or three for \$79. Select your preferred option upon registration. Bring an apron and enough deep foil containers to transport your creations home. Class size is limited to 15.

What a Landscape Architect Can Do For You

May 19 (Thursday) 2:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Join landscape architect and owner of Landscape Design Innovation Group (LDIG), Jeremy Rust, as he discusses the many facets of design and construction that must be considered to build a successful project whether it be a small shade garden or an elaborate outdoor living and entertainment area. Jeremy will also offer insights into the steps he has taken to streamline all levels of his design/build business from design, estimating, financials, administrative duties, and even a proprietary on-the-job-training and employee development program called LDIG U.



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Spring Garden Tips

- Plant out spring vegetables
- Divide many types of perennials
- Clean up perennial and annual beds for the new season
- Apply fresh mulch in your garden and landscape
- Plant summer blooming bulbs

