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Over the Garden Gate

President's Corner

Shantha McDonald

The autumnal equinox heralds cooler weather and shorter days – it's time to clean the garden in preparation for winter.

While some gardeners choose to plant cool weather vegetables and flowers others choose to take a break until spring. I am in the latter camp, except for planting a few pansies.

Before putting your garden to rest try collecting some seeds in preparation for spring. Gardeners have been collecting, saving, and sharing seeds from their gardens for ages. Seeds from annual flowers and vegetables will give you a head start on your spring garden.

Most flowers should be ready with ripe seed pods by now. Vegetables on the other hand require a little more planning ahead.

It is possible to collect and save seeds from a variety of flowers. Annuals are prolific seed producers and the easiest to collect from. Seeds from perennials and biennials can be collected too. However, it is easy to divide those plants to have more of them in your garden. To collect seeds you should have a wide-mouthed plastic container handy. If the seeds are very small just shake the flower pod directly into the container. With large flower pods, such as zinnias, pick them and lay them out on a flat tray. I use an old pizza pan.

Crush the seed pods carefully with your fingers and gently blow away any debris in the tray. Spread the seeds out on a paper towel and set them out on a countertop in a low-traffic area of the house to dry them completely. Place the dry seeds in an envelope and label it. Then store the envelope in an air-tight container.

Vegetables too can contribute to your seed collection. It is easy to save seeds from plants such as tomatoes, peppers, peas, and beans since they are self-pollinating. Self-pollinating vegetables produce flowers that have both male and female parts in the same flower, making them easily pollinated by the wind.

Seeds from vegetables such as cucumbers, pumpkins, and squash produce separate male and female flowers requiring pollination by pollinators. Hence, their best characteristics may not be passed on to the next generation.

Do not collect seeds from hybrid vegetables, usually indicated on their labels, because the resulting plants may not be the best quality.

To collect seeds from self-pollinating vegetables, for example peas, identify the best suitable plant and the best looking pea pod. Leave that pea pod on the vine until it reaches maturity and turns brown. Then pick it and let it dry further on a paper towel until it is completely dry. Then put the pod in an envelope, label it, and store it in an airtight container. Place the container in a cool area of the house.

For tomatoes and peppers, again identify the healthiest plant with the best looking fruits. Allow the fruit to ripen on the plant before picking. Remove the seeds along with the pulp and place them in a strainer. Rinse well under tap water using your fingers to separate the seeds from the pulp. Spread the seeds on a paper towel to dry. Place the dried seeds in an envelope, label it, and store in an airtight container – I use a glass container. You can store all of your seed envelopes in one container.

Now it's time to start your garden clean up since you've collected your seeds. Don't forget there is a delicate micro-ecosystem in your garden. Many beneficial insects live there. Leave some plants with seeds behind for birds to feed on. Also, don't remove hollow-stemmed plants such as swamp hibiscus and plants of the asteraceae family, which provide homes for insects during the winter.

After the cleanup is done it is a good time to have your soil tested so you can prepare your soil before spring planting. Now that the hard work is done you can sit in your easy chair with your note pad and pencil to start planning your spring garden while enjoying the fall season.

Shantha

Write for Us!

Like to write? Have something to say? Your fellow master gardeners want to hear from you!

Email Rick at
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Inside This Issue:

President's Corner	1
Laurel Wilt Disease	2
Fall Garden Calendar	2
Pondless Water Feature	3
Match Pots & Plants	4

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Laurel wilt is a disease of woody plants in the Laurel (Lauraceae) family. In our area it could affect our native sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) and spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) trees.

Luckily, mountain laurel, rhododendron, loblolly bay and sweetbay magnolias don't seem to be susceptible to this disease. Redbays (*Persea borbonia*) are by far the most widely affected host, with extensive mortality occurring in coastal areas from North Carolina to Mississippi, moving toward Alabama and Louisiana.

So, why should we be concerned about LWD here in Hall County? Because two cases of laurel wilt have been confirmed in Cobb County.



Laurel wilt is caused by *Raffaelea lauricola*, a fungal pathogen, which is transmitted by the redbay ambrosia beetle (*Xyleborus glabratus*). This beetle is native to southern Asia and was first documented in Georgia in 2002. This beetle is a small, elongate, cylindrical beetle about 2 mm long.

There are many species of ambrosia beetles, some breed in living trees while most prefer dying or recently cut trees. All ambrosia beetles carry a fungus with

them and most of the time the fungus is not lethal to the tree; however, the redbay ambrosia beetle carries a fungus that is pathogenic to the host. These beetles don't actually feed on wood, but instead, adults and larvae feed on fungi that are inoculated into galleries in the sapwood by the adult females. Female redbay ambrosia beetles can fly, males cannot. New infestations occur when a single, female beetle flies to a host tree, reproduces and is able to establish a whole new population without even mating.



Newly attacked trees show few external symptoms. Small strings of compacted sawdust may protrude from the bark at the point of attack but these strings easily disintegrate and therefore are not always readily visible. If you remove the bark at the point of attack you will find shot holes from which a dark stain extends into the surrounding xylem. The stain is the tree's response to the infection from the fungus, which will gradually spread throughout much of the outer sapwood. Once infection occurs, the fungus spreads quickly throughout the tree's vascular system, preventing movement of water within the tree. Infected trees die quickly, often showing a full crown of dead, brown

leaves. As the tree dies it may be colonized by other species of ambrosia beetles. The beetles are wood borers and tunnel deep within a tree and may even remain inside once the tree is dead.



Sadly, there is no cure once a tree has this disease and management options for preventing the spread of the disease are limited. To avoid spreading the beetle and pathogen to new areas, on-site chipping and burning of infested material is recommended. Chemical treatments may be effective for high value trees. The Georgia Forestry Commission, Georgia DNR and Georgia State Parks all advise people buy local firewood to prevent the spread of pests, such as Emerald Ash Borer, European Gypsy Moth and others, within the state. Check out the website Don't Move Firewood <https://www.dontmovefirewood.org/map/georgia/> for more resources.

If you observe a dying host tree and suspect laurel wilt contact the Extension Office. Do NOT send samples, as infested material could transport the beetle to new locations. Remember it only takes one redbay beetle to create an infestation.

Fall Gardening Calendar

Rick Freeland

Your gardening tasks for fall:

Zone 7

- Set out transplants of cool-weather vegetables
- Prune cane fruits such as raspberries and blackberries
- Plant winter pansies and fall annuals (calendula, dianthus, ornamental cabbage and kale)
- Plant peonies
- Plant fall-blooming bulbs to brighten up fading windowboxes, planters and in drifts among ornamental grasses
- Continue to harvest herbs and flowers for drying

- Divide peonies, bearded iris and other spring- and summer-blooming perennials
- Plant bareroot trees and shrubs
- Order sweet pea seedlings for fall planting
- Plant herbs and groundcovers as the weather cools

Zone 8

- Plant bareroot trees and shrubs
- Order sweet pea seedlings for fall planting
- Set out second crop of tomato and and pepper plants

- Sow seeds of green beans, squash, pumpkins and cucumbers
- Divide bearded iris and other overcrowded spring- and summer-blooming perennials
- Prune cane fruits
- Continue to harvest herbs and flowers for drying
- Sow seeds of perennials and keep soil moist if rainfall is scarce
- Start cool-weather vegetables from seed now or set out store-bought transplants later in the month
- Plant winter pansies and fall annuals (calendula, dianthus, ornamental cabbage and kale)

What the Heck? Thermotropism

Thermotropism is a plant's growth response to temperature. One example is the curling of Rhododendron leaves during cold temperatures. Another is when lettuce is grown in winter in unheated greenhouses. In very cold weather, lettuce shows some leaf curling, a degree of leaf wrinkling uncharacteristic of the variety. Leaves may also "hug the ground", as if seeking warmth or shelter.

Want the tinkling serenity of moving water in the garden without the mess of a traditional waterfall and pond feature? A pondless water feature can liven any space.

Gardens and ponds seem to go together. Introducing water, moving or otherwise, into the garden evokes tranquility and a sense of delight.

Full blown ornamental ponds, however, can be expensive and messy - even dangerous. They can also be maintenance nightmares. But gardeners have an alternative - the "disappearing water" water feature.

A pondless water feature can be as simple as a rain chain hanging from a gutter over an infiltration basin filled with river stone, or as elaborate as a tiered waterfall cascading into a constructed stream bed, where it disappears almost magically into the ground.

Pondless water features can fit almost anywhere - in a small garden nook, beside an entryway, as a back yard focal point. Pondless translates to adaptability.

Advantages of Pondless Water Features

What are the advantages of "going pondless"?

First, they're safer. Flowing water usually winds up in a pebble bed, rock basin, or something similar. There's little risk of children drowning in a pondless water feature.

Homeowners can save money. Vanishing water features use less water and electricity. They can be turned off at night, or when the homeowner is gone, either manually or by using a timer. And since it's a pondless feature, evaporation of standing water is curtailed drastically. Some designs can even utilize rain water.

They're also easy to construct. It's a great do-it-yourself project for the handy gardener, using a kit or building from scratch with separately purchased materials (it's cheaper that way - kits can be expensive). Or hire a contractor.

Maintenance is a breeze. Keep leaves and debris from the receiving area, and clean the pump maybe twice a year. Since there's no standing water in the basin, algae and stagnation won't be a problem. And no stagnation means no mosquitoes.

Pondless Water Feature Locations

Where a gardener puts a pondless water feature depends on what he wants to accomplish - his design program. A small feature like a pondless bubbler fountain resembles a piece of sculpture and can work almost anywhere - even on

an apartment balcony. A feature incorporating waterfalls will need more space.

Site the pondless water feature in a prominent location, where it can serve as a focal point. Building next to an entryway is a fine way to welcome guests. Or place one next to a patio or a private relaxation nook, where family and guests can experience the sights and sounds of splashing water.

Building a Pondless Water Feature

Whether installing a small feature like a bubbler fountain, or a larger one like a waterfall, pondless water features are easy to build - by the homeowner, or by a professional.

If using a contractor, make sure he's experienced in water feature installation. Obtaining a design from a qualified designer like a landscape architect is critical if a natural look is desired. Some so-called "natural look" waterfalls fit in like a nudist at a church picnic. It takes real talent and artistry to mimic nature, so take design into account.



Of course, designs can run from completely realistic features seamlessly integrated into a slope, to more formal tiered geometrical structures, to small sculptural fountains. Realism is hard to create convincingly, and formal structures may need some engineering, so it may be better to hire a landscape contractor specializing in water features and experienced in interpreting design drawings when considering these type features.

Generally, however, a homeowner can construct a small pondless water feature, like a sculptural-type bubbler fountain, himself. The one shown above uses stone as the focal point.

Construct a Stone Bubbler Fountain

- Obtain a large, decorative stone from a quarry or other source. Have the quarry drill a vertical hole through the stone from end to end and deliver it to the site. If the stone is too heavy, the homeowner should get help in placing it.
- Next, prepare the basin. Buy a Rubbermaid tub, like a horse trough (don't use plastic, it degrades over time). These sell for around \$40.00.
- Dig a hole and bury the tub, backfilling around it so that 4" of the rim is above ground. Make sure the tub is level.
- Fill the tub with water. Use a hose to soak the backfill and settle the tub (filling the tub with water *first* prevents it from floating from the ground).
- Install the pump in the tub in an accessible place (for future cleaning). The pump provider can help determine the size pump needed for the type pondless water feature desired.
- Connect flexible tubing long enough to reach from the pump through the hole in the stone and to the starting point.
- Cover the pump with a section of 8" x 10" PVC pipe. The end of the PVC should be just below the rim of the tub.
- Fill the tub with rocks, with larger stones on the bottom.
- Make sure the pump's cord is sticking out of the PVC; then place a flat rock over the opening.
- Place topsoil around the 4" of tub rim left exposed.
- Conceal top edge of the tub with more rocks.
- Plant with shrubs, flowering perennials or ornamental grasses, and mulch.
- A periodic application of dry bacteria or chlorine will maintain water quality.

Done right, a pondless water feature can provide the feeling of a cool oasis in a homeowner's garden, for all to enjoy.

Sources:

Life123 website, "How to Build a Pondless Waterfall", by Jan Goldfield

Exotic Aquatics website, "Disappearing Pondless Waterfall"; Exotic Aquascapes, Inc.



When planning a container garden, don't overlook the importance of a plant's growing habit, whether upright, mounding, trailing, or something else. Also consider the plant's ultimate height and spread.

Once a plant's growth characteristics are known, the gardener can match it with a container.

For single plants or the dominant plant in a design, the general rule is that the plant should be about twice the height of the container, and 1.5 times the width.

Typical Plant Forms and Container Shape Combinations

Some plant forms just seem naturally complimentary with certain container shapes. Some of these combinations are

- *Tall containers* stand out, and go well with clipped, formal, topiary plant forms. Trailing plants also fit well with tall containers, as the container's height allows the trailing plant plenty of vertical room to shine. Tall containers can lift fragrant plants closer for better olfactory appreciation.
- *Rectangular containers*, like window boxes and troughs, lend themselves to symmetrical planting, whether balanced formally or informally.
- *Oval pots* create an informal mood, and look good from most any angle.



- *Flat, shallow pots or trays* lend themselves to viewing from above. Locate them close to the viewer, maybe on a pot display stand or a shelf. Use plants that don't need much potting medium and look good when seen in bird's-eye view. Succulents work well with this time container.
- *The typical terra-cotta pot* is fan-shaped. Use spreading plants that continue the lines of the container vertically.



- *Bell-shaped containers* are perfect for mound forming plants (to give height) combined with trailing plants for softening.
- *Architectural containers* and plants go together naturally. Plant single architectural form plants in modern metal or sharp edged containers, and use as accents.
- *Eclectic containers* (also called "freestyle") can be almost anything – old wheelbarrows, cans, or baskets - even decommissioned boots!

There's no better place than a nursery for gardeners to match their plants to their containers. There, they can physically experiment with various combinations before deciding, and possibly receive advice from knowledgeable nursery personnel.

With immature plants, it's sometimes hard to visualize how the plant will look with a chosen container. Try sketching the plant's mature form combined with the form of the container to get a clearer idea of what the ultimate combination will look like.

Of course, contrasting the form and texture of a plant with that of a container may work, also. A plant's eventual form should be in harmony with both the container and the area where it will be used.

Remember, the final composition should not only please your senses, but satisfy your sense of creativity. Plan wisely, but don't be afraid to experiment. Sometimes following your intuition can result in a happy accident - a whimsical arrangement that no amount of pre planning could create. When that happens, thank the gardening gods, sit back, sip a margarita and enjoy your masterpiece!



Piecing it All Together