

The Clod-Hopper



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Gardeners of Wake County, Inc. — Raleigh, NC

March 2018

Tough Love

by Paul Hoffman, President

I learned a new gardening word a year or two ago. The word is “coppice.” As a verb, it means to cut back a tree or shrub down to its roots. It’s a good word to know and understand, but an even better one to put into practice.



For years I was very timid pruner, cutting out a few dead or ungainly stems, thinking that that last year’s growth would be grateful for the head start it had from the past. However, I was surprised to find out that some (be careful, it’s some, not all) of my shrubs seem to really like a drastic haircut and grow back more vigorously than I ever imagined. It’s as if the old stems were tired out from the previous year’s efforts and are ready to be replaced by vigorous youth. The new shoots grow fast, leaves are bigger, and flowers seem to be fuller and more abundant.

I had a line of abelias that were getting long and leggy over the years. I tried to make them look good by trimming them up every few months, but the light trimming gave very little reward for a lot of effort. Then I read that abelias would respond well to a drastic cut back. Sceptically, on a cold February day, I cut out most of the stems and cut back the bare remaining ones to less than a foot high. I thought, “This is sure going to ugly for the next few years,” but lo and behold, by June, the new growth was thick, green, and handsome. By fall, the abelias were back to full-size and flowering wonderfully.

Another learning experience came from an icy winter storm. I had a eucalyptus which was doing nicely with several powdery blue stems standing about eight feet tall. The storm dealt a cruel blow and

Club Meetings

Monthly meetings are at 7:30 PM at the JC Raulston Arboretum every 3rd Tuesday. Refreshments and socializing begin at 7:00.

Gardeners who’d like more songbirds on their property should be sure to attend the March 20 GWC meeting to hear guest speaker Preston Montague explain how trees and shrubs help our feathered friends decide whether they’ll hang out with us or hop the fence to a neighbor’s yard. Montague, an NC State grad, is an artist, educator, and landscape designer. He hopes to give club members and guests practical knowledge about developing a year-round bird watching sanctuary in our own backyards.

The date is Tuesday, March 20th. The time, 7:30 PM. We’ll see you there!

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Club Officers and Committees

Board members

President: Paul Hoffman

Vice President: Don Strickland

Secretary: Jim Moore

Treasurer: Mac Williamson

Immediate Past President: Sherrill Johnson

At-large board members: Barbara Brown, Ginny Parker, Ed Ponek, Gail Posey

Committee members

Activities Chairs: Will Farmer (seed swap), Renee Engates (refreshments), Mark Boone (picnic), Ginny Parker (awards banquet)

Audit: Rose Cotton, Charles Gilliam, Kathy Moore

Azalea Sale: Charlie Leverett

Beautification Awards: Josephine Tayao

Club Awards: Jim Moore

Endowment Investment: Charles Gilliam

Friendship: Reed and Chris Elliott

Historical: Donna Farmer,

Membership: Barbara Brown

Newsletter Editors: Laine Thomas, Reed Elliott

Nominating: TBA

Programs: Don Strickland

Projects: Sharon LaRusch

Publicity: Charles Gilliam

Refreshments: Renee Engates

Scholarship: Joanne Boone

Telephone: Johnny Johnson

Webmaster: Reed Elliott

Tough Love

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snapped off the branches a few feet from the ground. I was forced to perform drastic surgery on the splintery stems and sawed them off below the ugly breaks. Again, I wondered if the patient would live, but, to my amazement, new shoots sprang forth and reached for the sky, growing about twelve feet tall by fall. It was only last year that I learned I was "coppicing" my plants (well maybe not totally,



but close to it). I was encouraged to extend my efforts, again with good results, to butterfly bushes, beautyberries, and hardy tapiocas and lantanas. Also it appears there are some other spring flowerers that appreciate a good haircut after they flower instead of before. [Read up on this yourselves](#) and be ready - ready to experiment boldly.



Contact Us

For additional information email our Club at gardener@gardenersofwakecounty.org

Contact Paul Hoffman, President, by phone at home: 919-781-0785 or by cell: 919-559-5495

Our Club webpage is available at <https://gardenersofwakecounty.weebly.com/>

GWC's March Speaker Explains How to Attract Birds by Planting the Right Shrubs and Trees

by Don Strickland, Vice President

Gardeners who'd like more songbirds on their property should attend the March 20 GWC meeting to hear guest speaker Preston Montague explain how trees and shrubs help our feathered friends decide whether they'll hang out with us or hop the fence to a neighbor's yard.

Montague is an artist, educator, and landscape designer whose love of nature was kindled while growing up next to the Shenandoah Valley near Charlottesville, Virginia. "It was a beautiful environment," he says, "historic horse country that I thought everyone was experiencing. But after living in urban and suburban areas, I realized that my childhood took place in very special surroundings."

Art came first for Montague: "I showed an ability to express myself visually at age three," he recalls. "Then, at seven, visit to a family friend who sold boxwoods out of her backyard initiated my love of gardening."



Jumping ahead to the year 2000, Preston obtained a fine arts degree from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro then worked as a professional aquarist to make ends meet between painting commissions. About that time, an eclectic group of friends he describes as "designers, punks, and Quakers" encouraged him to leave the water and get back on terra firma. "They showed me the role gardeners can play as agitators for the social good," he remembers. "Through them, I learned garden arrangement from an interior design perspective and developed a fundamental passion for environmental and social justice."

A year later, Montague moved to Raleigh and started his formal gardening education at North Carolina State...ultimately earning a bachelor's horticulture degree and a Master's in Landscape Architecture. He now works on projects that encourage stronger relationships between people and their environment for the purpose of improving public health.

Preston teaches a number of courses at the Raulston Arboretum, including *Designing for Songbirds with Shrubs and Trees*. It's a two-part class that shows students how professional landscape designers attract songbirds into the garden.

In his GWC presentation, Montague will offer tips and tactics for successful planting along with species suggestions that birds find irresistible. The goal is to give club members and guests practical knowledge about developing a year-round bird watching sanctuary. In addition to his talk on attracting birds, Preston will offer some of his artwork for sale. His art is "environmentally-focused," he says. "Even in art school, I kind of eschewed a lot of figure drawing and still life in favor of landscapes."

A View of Longview

by Sharon LaRusch and Kalli Shevzov

Kuddos and thanks to the volunteers that helped with check-in, lopped, dug, raked, pulled, pruned, wheelbarrowed, measured, flagged, ID'd, tagged, plotted, and marked. I will admit, in the back of my mind, I had wondered if there was such a thing as too many volunteers. But I tell you, the teams worked beautifully! In addition, I had one of our members volunteer to help with the Longview update for the *Clod-Hopper* this month. I truly enjoyed Kalli Shevzov's perspective so I'd like to share it with you...

A small photo in the December 2017 Clod-Hopper caught my eye. The photo showed a narrow footpath leading between two rows of overgrown plantings - boxwoods perhaps? To the left, was that a very large and untamed crepe myrtle? The pathway apparently led into infinity, into a magic light with no visible end. Volunteers were needed, the GWC was considering a service project, and plans were afoot to clear away an estimated half century of overgrowth. The holidays are a busy time, and I gave the Longview Garden service project no further thought ... until the January Clod-Hopper arrived. A larger version of that photo, the same narrow path leading into bright light amid dense overgrowth, accompanied an article describing a successful first workday on the project. Coffee and donuts, camaraderie, a work plan, and willing workers, led to the growth of a sizable debris pile and the clearing of a walkable path. I felt prompted to clear my Tuesday evenings once a month to get to GWC meetings and participate in some way!

Project organizers Sharon LaRusch and Lynn Swanson spoke about the Longview Garden project at Wake-Med at the February Club meeting, and their infectious enthusiasm led 26 people to come out to work on the Garden Walk at Longview held on February 24th.



What did I find when I arrived at Longview? I looked through the entry shown in the photos, and saw boxwoods, some bright flashes of forsythia, and a row of daffodils in cheery bloom. Johnny and Sherrill Johnson were working to the right. Johnny pointed out a live cedar tree, devoid of green below the

dense cover of vines, but reaching toward the sun with a tuft of green at its very top. To the left, a measuring team marked the garden area off in quadrants, no easy task with thick underbrush, poison ivy, and a chain link fence obstructing their efforts. Ashley H. was busy measuring when I arrived. Ashley is not a club member, but a WakeMed volunteer and an enthusiastic gardener.

As I walked further into the overgrowth, I saw a brick pathway surfacing from beneath years of accumulated leaf debris and covered with a network of vines. A cluster of volunteers were enjoying the results of their efforts. Jacque G. said she came to work in the garden because she loves to work outside, as long as it isn't too hot. Barbara Brown pointed out a camellia she worked around, and wondered if it could be an

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A View of Longview (continued from page 4)

an original plant. Indeed, there was a red camellia, in bloom, and a white camellia beside it. "Is that a camellia?" Don Strickland asked in surprise. Chris Maxwell said she was hopeful that two of the crepe myrtles in the garden are survivors from the original planting.

Bill Maxwell shook his head, and commented tersely, "Whole lotta wisteria vines." He was so right. As I walked further into the walkway, I saw vines the size of a strongman's thigh, vines wound around trees, vines hanging, vines that looked like reclining saplings. Mark Boone quipped, "Wisteria is like sin. It looks good at first, but it can kill you!"



Toward the back of the walkway, near Kidd Road, leaf mold and debris and a network of vines still covered the brick walkway. A group of volunteers were busy cutting away overgrowth, removing the top layers.

At quitting time, volunteers met at the parking area to recap progress. Lynn Swanson gave kudos to the measuring team for establishing a grid within the garden. A significant portion of the brick path is now clear. Plants identified Saturday included

maple, buxus, forsythia, magnolia, red and white camellias, crepe myrtle, mimosa, oakleaf hydrangeas, acuba, spirea, and cedar.

All in all, a productive work session, a good time in a garden, and a step into an earlier time. Hope to see everyone next month at Longview!

So at the end of the day, we were mere feet away from the back buffer at the Kidd Road end of the walk. Even from there, you could clearly see the door of the Longview House. Maybe that is where the name comes from!

Our next workday is Saturday, March 24th! Mark your calendars and let us know if you can attend! We'll talk about it more at the next Club meeting, Tuesday, March 20th. For information or to confirm you'll be at the next work party, contact:

Sharon njoynthejourne@yahoo.com or Lynn chocolategardener@yahoo.com



Early Spring in North Carolina

by Laine Thomas, Editor

February can be rewarding for gardeners in North Carolina with a spectacular show of flowers that makes it feel like spring starts early. A remarkable number of fragrant flowers are blooming. These include daphne odora, edgeworthia chrysantha, magnolia soulangeana, and hyacinth.

This year, everyone is talking about magnolia soulangeana (tulip magnolia or saucer magnolia). This is the deciduous version that has recently been covered in pink flowers with no leaves. A large grove of them line the onramp from Glenwood Avenue to Wade Avenue. My neighborhood has two specimens that are 20 feet tall and bunch of new transplants that are 4 feet tall. These shrubs are sensitive to February freezes that can damage the buds and reduce the show. But this month has been rather warm and produced the maximum display. People keep asking me "What is that!?" It was so beautiful that my son was making snow angels in the fallen petals and we all stood to enjoy the fragrance. These are a great shrub (or small tree) that is tolerant of the North Carolina clay soil and makes February really exiting.

Also helping to create the impression of an early spring come daffodils and hyacinth. I love these simple bulbs more and more every year. They can be virtually ignored throughout the year, but create a burst of color in February. Daffodils increase naturally from year to year. My clusters started with one flower and now bloom 10 flowers each.



In contrast, hyacinth will generally need to be propagated or re-planted every 3 to 4 years. That is still a pretty light workload. The hyacinth add additional fragrance to the early spring garden. They should be planted in large clusters to achieve the maximum scent. Hyacinth and daffodils pair nicely. Deer and rodents will tend to avoid the daffodils while both can thrive in locations that are shaded by deciduous trees but sunny in winter. That is almost my entire garden.

The shade garden often can't support a really showy mix of flowers. These bulbs offer a chance to overcome the limitations of shade (at least from deciduous trees). After the blossoms fade, it is important to allow the foliage to yellow naturally rather than cutting. Otherwise flowering in the subsequent year will be reduced.



My Corner of the Garden

by Reed Elliott, Editor

This year's very warm February reminds me of my first spring in North Carolina. When we moved here four years ago, one of our memorable garden encounters was with red clay. Red clay has many agricultural virtues, but it also has some big drawbacks. First, it sheds water like a duck's back and stays dry an inch below the surface even after significant watering or rainfall. Second, while it's loaded with essential minerals, it's devoid of the organic compounds needed to support soil flora and fauna so plants can't take advantage of those minerals. Bottom line, without significant amendment, it's tough to get gardens to thrive in red clay. I know of only two ways to fix the problem. Amend your entire property – that's the Tony Avent solution at [Plant Delights](#) (if you haven't been there, it's a must). This method takes 20 years and a lot of hard and expensive work. Alternatively, you can build raised beds. You can probably guess which method I chose.



Now, making a "raised bed" often involves building a large box out of some rot-resistant wood like redwood or cedar and then installing in-ground plumbing and hard-wired drip irrigation systems. I was not up for that. Fortunately, one of our first garden outings in North Carolina was to Duke Gardens. There, we encountered the concept of "mounding" as a quick and easy way to get the advantages of raised beds without the time, effort, or investment required for hard-walled versions. The concept is

simple. Heavily amend defined areas of garden space and then mound the amended soil into desired shapes and sizes about 8 – 12 inches above the general surrounding soil level. Voila! Rich soil, good drainage and tons of vegetables and flowers. We use cages purchased from GWC speaker [Frank Hyman](#) (the liberated gardener) to direct growth upward and maintain vegetables in contained perimeters. By the way, Frank's cages are not only the best, they're reasonably priced. He sells them only in the spring. If you're think-



ing of serious vegetable gardening, now's the time to [contact him](#).



There are two other things I want to be sure to mention this month. First, I want to remind all members to go to the Club Website and [sign up to work a day or two at the Club's Annual Azalea Sale](#). This is the primary fundraiser for our yearly scholarships. We typically raise more than \$10,000 each year, but it only happens if people step up and volunteer. Second, bookmark and be sure to visit [the Club's new webpage](#) on and off throughout the month. There are, and will continue to be, lots of new and pertinent things appearing there all the time. Spring is almost here! Time to get gardening!

New Members

The Gardeners of Wake County welcomes anyone and everyone who loves gardens and gardening. This month we're happy to have added Denise Atkinson, Brennie Holloman, Mary Scott and Thomas Pope (all from Raleigh) and Doris Kester from Benson. Be sure to say, "Hi and welcome" when you see them at the next meeting.