

The Clod-Hopper



Volume 3, digital edition 11

Gardeners of Wake County, Inc. — Raleigh, NC

November 2019

Got Fire Ants?

with thanks to Sherrill Johnson, Past President and Master Gardener

Editor's Note: These little critters are becoming more common here in NC and a lot of GWC members may be struggling with them in their gardens. Sherrill Johnson ran across this information from the Master Gardeners and generously passed it along. If you haven't been plagued yet, they're coming!



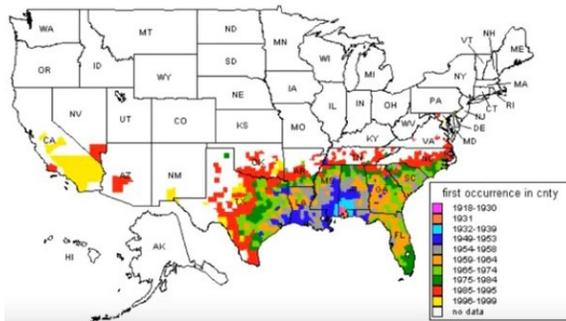
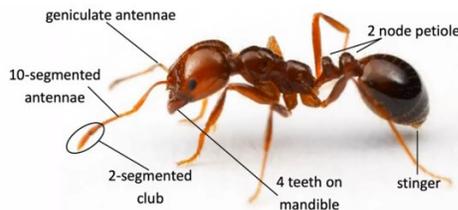
Termite



Ant

Vicky Bertagnolli, Clemson University Extension, has been studying fire ants for years and recently spoke to the Master Gardeners about them. The first thing she teaches is how to know the enemy. Only ants have elbowed antennae and thread-like waists. Imported fire ants differ from

other ants because they bite and sting. Most ants only bite, injecting a bit of formic acid, but fire ants bite in order to hold on to give a fierce sting. Black, red, and mixed black and red varieties are now in many parts of the southern US. Americans are spending \$6 billion/year in associated costs, including pesticides. The good news is that fire ants



don't exist much above the Mason-Dixon Line because they cannot survive cold winters. Fire ants spread mostly by human transport of plants, soil, and through the nursery trade. Like bees, fire ant babies come from a queen which can live up to 7 years. It takes about 6

months for a colony to develop enough to be seen, about 1-2" high and 3-6" across. Although they are territorial, there may be up to 15 -18 separate colonies per acre. A fire ant mound, containing between 2-400,000 ants, is like an iceberg, with most of it below ground. Note the tunnels beyond the mound in the diagram on page 2. This is where the fire ants go out to forage, not through the mound itself. Although they can be beneficial, fire ants, like other types of ants, tend aphids and scale insects, protecting them from predation and collecting their

Club Meetings

The Gardeners of Wake County meet at the JC Raulston Arboretum every 3rd Tuesday. Refreshments and socializing start at 7:00 and the evening's guest presentation begins at 7:30.

Our guest speaker for November is lifetime GWC member Tony Avent. Blunt, funny, charismatic and hewing to no cultural sensibility except his own, Tony cannot be counted on to make dreamy observations about his life's work, or tell you that gardening provides a soulful connection to nature. "To have a garden like this is insane," Tony drawls as he speaks of his internationally famous *Plant Delights Nursery*. "We should be in the nuthouse."

Join other gardening nuts at the GWC November meeting on Tuesday the 18th when we'll hear a master speaker and gardener tell us about "Native Trillium in Your Garden." This is a rare opportunity to enjoy a remarkable man and gardener discuss one of the great loves of his life. Don't miss it!

continued on page 2

Club Officers and Committees

Board members

President: Virginia (Ginny) Parker
Vice President: TBA
Secretary: Jim Moore
Treasurer: Mac Williamson
Immediate Past President: Paul Hoffman
At-large board members: Barbara Brown, Rich Engates, Leslie Cohen, Eddie Robinson

Committees

Activities Chairs: Will Farmer, Reed & Christine Elliott (seed swap), Renee Engates (refreshments), Mark Boone (picnic), Ginny Parker (awards banquet)
Audit: Charles Gilliam, Sharon LaRusch, Reed Elliott, Donna Farmer
Azalea Sale: Charlie Leverett
Beautification Awards: Laine Thomas
Club Awards: Jim Moore
Endowment Investment: Charles Gilliam
Friendship: Chris Elliott
Historical: Donna Farmer
Membership, Barbara Brown
Newsletter Editor: Reed Elliott
Nominating: TBA
Programs: TBA
Projects: Sharon LaRusch, Lynn Swanson
Publicity: Charles Gilliam
Scholarship: Joanne Boone
Telephone: Johnny and Sherrill Johnson
Webmaster: Reed Elliott

Contact Us

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

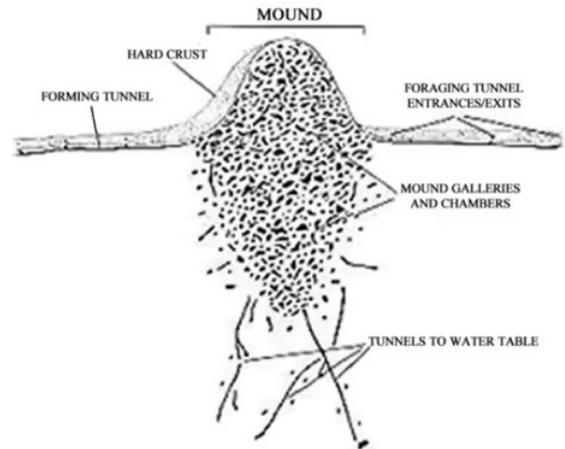
Contact Ginny Parker, President, by phone at home: 919-832-5483 or by cell: 919-880-3233

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

Got Fire Ants?

(continued from page 1)

honeydew. Just to make life complete, fire ants will nest in electrical equipment, even chewing the wires.



Which brings up the question, “How can we control these critters?” There are a lot of myths but the truth is that baits are far more effective than any other form of control. Bait must be fresh. Most baits break down with heat and UV. Storing baits in a garage with materials that have volatile chemicals (gas, paints, insecticides, oil) will contaminate the bait so it will not be eaten. For problem mounds (next to your path, your dog house, etc.) a 2-step approach is recommended. Put out a bait and a week later use a contact pesticide on the mound. Spinosads are not effective because populations bounce back. You should avoid using any pesticide, including baits, in a vegetable garden, but since fire ants forage up to 100 yards away from their colony, it can be used around garden perimeters. If a mound is near a body of water, never spread poisons in the water. Successful baiting is most likely when the soil temperature is 70-85°F. To see if ants are foraging, put a greasy potato chip on the ground and check it in 10-30 minutes. Bait has to stay dry for 2-6 hours while the ants collect it. Fortunately, most baits that target fire ants don’t affect other types of ants and insects. Once you control the fire ants, native insects will return. Unfortunately, we cannot expect to eradicate fire ants, only manage/control them.

November Features Renowned Plantsman, Horticulturist and Longtime GWC Member, Tony Avent

Adapted from an [article that appeared in the Washington Post Magazine, Sept. 2019](#)



Our guest speaker for November is lifetime GWC member Tony Avent. Tony grew up in Raleigh. When he was 5, he got his parents to send off for mail-order plants and began to assemble them in terrariums and dish gardens. By the time he was 7, his father had built him a greenhouse. "I began growing plants for sale; we would have neighbors knocking on the door," he says. Tony's plan after graduation from college was to move to Florida and start a nursery selling houseplants. Instead he found himself dragged into a gentlemen's garden club (the original Gardeners of Wake County) and ended up volunteering his time cleaning up and weeding in the nearby state fairgrounds. That was just the beginning.

Nowadays, Tony runs two enterprises out of what was once a hardscrabble tobacco farm 20 minutes south of Raleigh. The first, Plant Delights Nursery, will this year ship 120,000 novel and pricey ornamental plants to garden enthusiasts across the United States. The other endeavor is a botanical garden of Avent's invention, filled with rare and unusual plants collected on 80 expeditions in the States and 12 other countries. Supplementing those with plants from other collectors, Tony has amassed 26,000 species and varieties and has a collection greater than many public botanical gardens in the country. Tony himself has been at the center of a golden age of collector-growers selling to en-



thusiasts and connoisseurs. Blunt, funny, charismatic and hewing to no cultural sensibility except his own, Tony cannot be counted on to make dreamy observations about his life's work, or tell you that gardening provides a soulful connection to nature. "To have a garden like this is *insane*," Tony drawls. "We should be in the nuthouse."

Come join the throng at the GWC November meeting on Tuesday November 18th when we'll be treated to hear a master speaker and master gardener tell us about "Native Trillium in Your Garden." This is a rare opportunity to hear a remarkable gardener discuss one of the great loves of his life. Don't miss it!

Fall Color Coming Soon to Longview

by Sharon LaRusch and Lynn Swanson

Longview welcomed us at our October workday like a long-lost friend! At least it kind of felt that way.

We've almost reached the moment when planting of the new Longview garden will begin. We all love to see trees and shrubs with leaves that turn brilliant shades of red, orange, and yellow in the fall. On the Garden Walk at Longview, we hope to include several natives that will help put on a show in future autumns. *Amelanchier*, or Serviceberry, is a native tree that was on the 1925 plan for the original Garden Walk at Longview. This tree gets a white flower in spring, followed by fruit that is edible for humans but also beloved by the birds. Fall color is often yellow/



orange to apricot. *Itea virginica*, or Virginia Sweetspire, is a native shrub that we also expect to have on the new plan. This is a shrub that has long racemes of white flowers in the spring. 'Henry's Garnet' is a selection that is known for its reliable reddish purple fall color. There were Viburnums included on the 1925 plan, and there is a local source for the cultivar 'Winterthur' of native *Viburnum nudum*, or smooth withered viburnum. As this large shrub develops, we can hope for the most interesting of shows. This plant produces berries that start out green, but turn pink and eventually blue to purple-black. It is possible to have pink and blue fruits on the plant at the same time. In addition, the leaves turn reddish purple in the fall. In scrolling through pictures of 'Winterthur,' Lynn says she has found berries of both colors on plants with leaves that are still green as well as on plants with leaves in their fall colors. Other plants, though less dramatic, can also bring quiet color to fall. The leaves of flowering dogwoods often turn a pleasing shade of dusty red; some crape myrtles color nicely before dropping their leaves, and ornamental grasses are attractive as they continue to sway in the breeze even as they brown. We will have these plants at Longview as well.



The weather for our October workday was absolutely beautiful and we took full of advantage of the cool crisp morning as the wheelbarrows created a new debris pile. We had a small but excited group of volunteers come out to visit Longview and tidy up... sort of a garden haircut. Hans did a fabulous job of trimming down the Crepe Myrtle while the rest of the crew cleared branches, twigs and weeds. Wisteria has been kept at bay for the most part thanks to WakeMed's assistance so there wasn't much greenery. But we

tackled that as well. It's a large space so we will still have some to finish up in November. We did take advantage of the timing and took eight soil samples from specific areas from our new garden plans. Sharon dropped them by the NC Soil Lab and we look forward to hearing the results soon.

Thanks again to those who came out for the October workday. We look forward to our next workday in November. In the meantime, enjoy fall in your own gardens and dream with us about future autumns at Longview!



A Backyard Wedding

by Mark Boone, Past President

Editor's note: November may not be the traditional time to think of weddings but Mark Boone sent this along to celebrate both the wedding and his magnificent garden. Nice to enjoy a taste of spring and love in November!

Devine and Vanessa were high school sweethearts who decided they wanted to spend their lives together. Eleven years after high school with two beautiful children and another one on the way they decided it was time to become Mr. and Mrs. The only questions were how and where. The Justice of the Peace was looking like the most viable option but how could they have guests?

Mark said, "How about our back yard and we will take care of the arrangements?" We planned our daughter's wedding for nearly a year. For this wedding we had three weeks to get everything in order—the program, meal, cake, music, and someone to officiate. Joanne suggested we divide and conquer. She would take care of the meal, cake, decorations, and table setup, and Mark would organize the



program and get the yard ready. Seemed like a pretty good deal for Mark. Joanne whipped up a buffet for the 30 guests and froze the food in ready to serve pans, then talked the bakery department at Costco into making a wedding cake. She used the floor length white tablecloths and silver table toppers from our daughter's wedding and lopped off crepe myrtle blooms from the trees for flowers.

Mark got an Internet ordination to perform the wedding and now also answers to the title the Right Reverend Boone. He took on the Japanese stilt grass with its three-year seed bank that had exploited an opening to grow after their competition got whacked back for the GWC picnic. He didn't expect the riding lawn mower to break a drive belt and have to go into the shop. Putting the best spin on the mower failure, the old walk behind mower provided a good opportunity for exercise. YouTube provided Cannon in D and Here Comes the Bride.

On the day of the service thunderstorms were forecast but the storms knew better than to spoil the day. Devine wore a tux and Vanessa a lovely dress. Their children were the attendants. The food got eaten, the cake cut, and everyone danced. More stilt grass came up later.



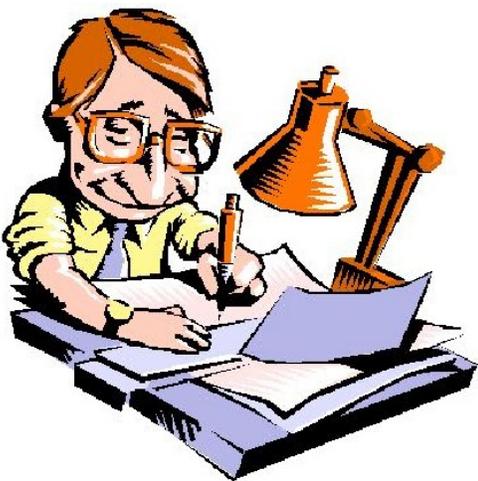
My Corner of the Garden

by Reed Elliott, Editor

October has mostly been a month of one hot, dry day after another. October 31st (Halloween) found my wife and I distributing candy out on our front porch in shorts and T-shirts in a sweltering 80 degree night to kids sweating in heavy costumes worn in expectation that by the end of October, fall would have arrived and bulky warmth would be the order of the day. Not so much. Having passed out the last of the candy, Chris and I doused the pumpkin, turned off the lights and headed to bed with the windows open and summer-like North Carolina mugginess wafting in. A few hours later we awoke to a freezing blast and pouring rain. Shivering, I dragged out the down comforter and turned on the electric blanket. True to form, North Carolina's evening of October summer had dropped 40 degrees within hours. By morning, temperatures felt almost wintery. The weather forecasters tell us that the first frosts will occur in the next day or two. I've got to say that gardening in North Carolina offers plenty variety if nothing else!

As we kiss October goodbye, I'd like to take a moment to honor some GWC members who did proctor duties at the State Fair Flower Exhibit. Their volunteer efforts earned hundreds of dollars for our Club and for the horticultural scholarships we give every year to a group of inspiring young NC State Horticulture majors. I'm sure everyone joins me in giving a big vote of thanks to (in no particular order) CJ Dykes, Lynn and Jim Swanson, Nancy Stevens, Donna Farmer, Mac Williamson, Eddie Robinson, Ginny Parker and Reed and Chris Elliott. Paul Hoffman our immediate past President also had offered his services. Unfortunately, a last-minute home appliance disaster intervened, but we thank Paul, too, for his always-ready willingness to help out. If I've overlooked anyone, please forgive the oversight because your efforts are appreciated!

Speaking of scholarships brings up the topic of the GWC Annual Awards Banquet. The December Banquet is soon upon us and I want to remind everyone that now's the time to reserve your place at the table. The location is the NC State University Club. The date (mark your calendar) is Tuesday, December 10th. The doors open at 6:00. The wild rumpus begins at 7:00. An open (cash) bar will be available. The price for members is a bargain at \$19.00 each for the first two. Guests after that have to pay what it actually costs to put on an event of this quality—\$50.00 each. Bring your checks to the next regular Club meeting on Tuesday, November 19th. If you have the misfortune to forget, don't forget to tell our Club President, Ginny Parker, that you'll be there. You can pay at the door but only if you've let Ginny know you'll be there. She's got to place the order for food and tables in advance, so places will be reserved only for those who reserve a place.



New Members

The Gardeners of Wake County welcomes anyone and everyone who loves gardens and gardening. This month we're happy to have added Rozanne J. Evans of Apex to our GWC family. Be sure to say "Hi and welcome" when you see her at the next meeting.