

NORTH COAST YARD & GARDEN

HORTICULTURAL NEWS AND INFORMATION FOR THE OHIO GARDENER

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IN MY GARDEN

Gardeners are known for having a huge backlog of ongoing projects, incomplete projects, abandoned projects, future projects, and projects that fall under the category of “yeah, right.” It’s not that gardeners are lazy, it’s just that we have such fertile imaginations we can’t help being swept away in our grand plans. At least that is what I keep telling myself.

Another reason (or excuse) is that gardening puts us in harmony with the seasons, and we understand that there are things that need to be done right now. There is a time to plant, a time to reap, a time to till soil, a time to discover the tiller won’t start. A time to water, a time to pull weeds, a time to deadhead old flowers, a time to cut your finger to the bone with the snippers. Yea, verily, there is a time for every purchase unto the garden center.

If you are one of those rare gardeners who are organized, or one of the much more common gardeners who give up trying to be organized sometime between the first day of spring and May, this is the time to start a garden journal.

A garden journal does not have to be fancy or meticulous – its purpose is to help you recall what worked and what didn’t work, what you liked and didn’t like, and what ideas you have for next year. I draw a map of my vegetable bed so I can rotate the crops from year to year, and I note the



variety name of each vegetable. At season’s end I note what grew well, what went wrong, and anything else that comes to mind. This helps to choose new varieties when browsing seed catalogs. I can then sketch out next year’s garden, making it easy to get it planted in spring.

I also keep a list of perennials, shrubs, trees and vines I’ve planted, with botanical name, variety, number planted, location and year planted. The original purpose of this list was to have a record for the next owners when I sell the house. I soon found it indispensable for recalling variety names. It is really easy to save plant tags and add to the list, but it becomes more difficult each year to keep up with what I moved, divided, removed or killed. Keeping the list on a computer spreadsheet allows me to sort it by location for an annual audit.

I keep the maps and lists in a three ring binder along with articles, pictures, and drawings of my ideas. It preserves my garden’s history and guides its future.

FEATURED TREE

AESCULUS GLABRA



In honor of The Ohio State University Buckeyes playing in the BCS National Championship on January 8, the buckeye is this issue's featured tree. Trees and shrubs in the genus *Aesculus* can be found all around the northern hemisphere, from Japan, China, India, southeast Europe and the United States. *Aesculus* species from North America are commonly called buckeyes, while those from Europe and Asia are called horsechestnuts. The name horsechestnut refers to the resemblance between the fruit of the edible chestnut (*Castanea*) and the *Aesculus* fruit. They were called "horse" chestnuts because the nuts are tougher and stronger than regular chestnuts, much like horseradish roots are larger and stronger than regular radishes.

The Ohio buckeye is *Aesculus glabra*, meaning "smooth buckeye". It was first described scientifically by the German botanist Carl Ludwig Willdenow in 1809, and is found growing in the fertile, moist soils of bottomlands and riverbanks throughout most of Ohio.

The native tribes named the fruit of the buckeye tree "hetuck", meaning the eye of a buck. They discovered that the inedible nuts can be made safe by roasting, peeling

and mashing, then repeatedly boiling the nutmeats in several changes of water. This removed the toxin aesculin, which destroys red blood cells. The resulting paste provided a nutritious starchy porridge. Fresh nuts were often powdered and dumped into small pools, making it easy to scoop out the killed or stunned fish. Deer and squirrels are immune to aesculin, so to them, the nuts are edible.

The botanical name *Aesculus* was taken from *Asclepios*, the name of the Greek god of medicine. Since antiquity, some people believed that carrying a buckeye or horsechestnut in the pocket or around the neck relieved rheumatism pain and provided good luck. Early explorers carried buckeyes back east and reported their supposed medicinal properties and talismanic attributes, making buckeyes a familiar natural remedy for years.

Ohio pioneers favored buckeye wood for cabin building and for making furniture and table utensils. Early settlers cut long, thin shavings of buckeye wood and wove them into summer hats. Buckeye wood is still used extensively for making artificial limbs because it is light, easily worked, and resists splitting.

Ohioans themselves came to be known as "Buckeyes" even before Ohio became a state. When the first court in the Northwest Territory was held on September 2, 1788, in Marietta, a town procession was formed. Ebenezer Sproat, the High Sheriff, led the parade with his sword drawn and held high. Indian bystanders were impressed with the bearing and appearance of the six-foot tall official, and called him "Hetuck" for "Big Buckeye Tree". The name stuck, and soon residents of the Ohio valley were called buckeyes by travelers, but it was a term of derision, similar to "hick" or "rube".

The name became a symbol of pride for Ohioans due to the efforts of Cincinnati

doctor Daniel Drake. On Christmas Day, 1833, he hosted a "Buckeye Dinner" and gave a speech extolling the virtues of the buckeye tree - it provided pioneers with soft, sturdy wood for cabins; the nut resembled the eye of the buck deer, the noblest part of a noble creature; the buckeye tree was slow to die even after repeated girdling; and even the cradles of native Ohioans were often made from buckeye wood. Dr. Drake's speech was published and distributed throughout the frontier, and soon buckeye celebrations were held throughout Ohio.

The term came into national use with the 1840 presidential campaign of Virginian-turned-Ohioan William Henry Harrison. Opponents had labeled him as a back woods man more suited to sitting in a log cabin drinking hard cider than to governing the country. Harrison and his supporters turned this insult into an advantage by using the buckeye image in campaign songs and slogans:

*"Hurrah for the Father of the Great West,
for the Buckeye who follows the plough."*

*"Oh where, tell me, where was your
buckeye cabin made?"*

*'Twas built among the merry boys who
wield the plough and spade,
Where the log cabins stand, in the bonnie
buckeye shade.*

*Oh what, tell me, what is to be your cabin's
fate?"*

*We'll wheel it to the capital and place it
there elate,
For a token and a sign of the bonnie
Buckeye state."*



The state flag of Ohio, adopted in 1902, also pays tribute to the buckeye. The white
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circle with a red center represents a buckeye, as well as the "O" in Ohio. The Ohio buckeye was officially adopted as the Ohio state tree on October 2, 1953.

It is uncertain when athletic teams at The Ohio State University first began to use the Buckeyes nickname. The OSU Athletic Council did not officially adopt the name until 1950, but records indicate that it was definitely established by 1920, and was likely used within twenty years of the university's founding in 1878.

Few states have such an interesting history of association with a particular tree or plant. We can all be proud of our heritage as buckeyes as our college football namesakes represent us next week.

FEATURED INSECT

SCIARA AND ORFELIA SPECIES

Those little black "fruit flies" that seem to appear when plants are brought in over winter are really fungus gnats, slightly smaller and darker in color than reddish-brown true fruit flies. Fungus gnats are a nuisance in their adult stage, flying near windows, light sources, and peoples' faces. Adults live about a week and do no damage, except to lay eggs on the surface of moist potting soil. Eggs hatch in a week, and larvae live for two weeks feeding on fungus, organic matter, and the rootlets and root hairs of houseplants. They then pupate for a week before emerging as adults and beginning the cycle anew.

Fungus gnats are common with over watered plants. Constant moisture breeds fungi that provide food for gnat larvae. Prevent gnats by letting potting soil get fairly dry between waterings. Minor infestations caught early may be controlled by watering only when the soil is dry.

Entrenched infestations require stronger measures. Remove and discard the top one or two inches of soil from the pot and replace it with fresh sterile potting soil. A half-inch layer of sand over the soil may discourage gnats since the sand dries quickly and has no organic food for larvae. Bad infestations in a single plant require a complete soil change. Throw away the old soil and rinse all traces of soil off the roots before repotting in new sterile potting soil.

If the gnats have infested several plants, use an insecticide to kill them. *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *israelensis* (Bti) are bacteria toxic to mosquitoes, flies and gnats, and harmless to everything else. It is ingested by the gnat larvae as they feed in the soil, and they soon die. Bti comes as a liquid, cake or granule that is added to the water used to water the plants. This treatment must be applied three times in one week intervals to kill all generations of larvae and eggs as they hatch. Do this to all your plants so the infestation does not simply move from one plant to another. Di-syston granules placed in the soil will also kill gnat larvae, but this chemical is toxic and will be absorbed and circulated throughout the plant.

Adult gnats are difficult to eliminate, but they have short life spans and will disappear in about a week. If they are too bothersome to tolerate, they can be trapped on sticky yellow cards placed horizontally near the infested plants. The gnats are attracted to the color and become stuck once they land.

Monitor your plants closely this winter and water carefully, and you should have few problems with fungus gnats.

GARDEN CALENDAR

- January is National Mail Order Gardening Month. Enjoy browsing garden catalogs on cold nights.
- Make a list of seeds to order and plant for the coming season.
- Gather apparatus for starting seedlings indoors. Buy new light bulbs if needed.
- Renew your memberships in gardening organizations.
- Water house plants sparingly since light is limited and growth is slow.
- Do not fertilize houseplants until April.
- Inspect houseplants for insect problems and treat as needed.
- Keep houseplants away from heat sources like air vents, radiators and on top of the television.
- Gently shake snow from shrubs after storms to prevent breakage.
- Move a live Christmas tree to a cool location and plant it as soon as possible.
- Cut up your old Christmas tree and use the boughs as mulch around perennials and shrubs.
- Place your old Christmas tree on its side in your yard as shelter for wildlife.
- Continue providing food and water for birds and wildlife.
- Keep an open hole in pond ice to let toxic decomposition gases escape.
- Avoid walking on frozen grass or plants. Frozen plants are easily killed.



ROGER S. BOLGER HAS OVER TEN YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL HORTICULTURAL EXPERIENCE AND HAS GARDENED ALL HIS LIFE IN NORTHEAST OHIO. HE HAS GIVEN DOZENS OF GARDENING TALKS AND SPECIALIZES IN WOODY PLANTS, PERENNIALS, TURF, ENTOMOLOGY, INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT, ORGANIC GARDENING, PONDS AND BACKYARD WILDLIFE.

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