

NORTH COAST YARD & GARDEN

HORTICULTURAL NEWS AND INFORMATION FOR THE OHIO GARDENER

BY ROGER S. BOLGER
Roger@RogerBolger.com



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IN MY GARDEN

Each fall something strange happens: spring-blooming trees and shrubs may suddenly have flowers again. Some gardeners who experience this for the first time have strong reactions. Some wonder if they have a new variety of reblooming shrubs, some wonder if they won't have flowers in the spring, and others see it as an omen for winter weather to come.

This is not as mysterious an event as it may seem. Spring-flowering woody plants generally bloom on old wood, or growth from the previous year. Flower buds form when the soft new growth ripens into harder wood, which is usually accomplished by mid-summer. The signal for the buds to begin swelling and open into flowers is when the plant comes out of dormancy after winter.

During some years, summer heat and drought can also induce dormancy in plants. This is not the bare-stemmed, seemingly dead state that plants use to endure freezing temperatures. This is a semi-dormancy, when plant processes slow or stop due to temperatures over 86 degrees or lack of water. Transplanting, physical damage, and other stresses can also induce semi-dormancy.

Once cool autumn air and moisture arrives, plants that had slowed or stopped their growth can return to normal, and in some plants this can trigger a fall bloom.

Gardeners in the south (USDA Hardiness Zone 8 or higher) may see this phenomenon so often that it may seem unusual to them if they do not rebloom.



Lantana (*Lantana camara*) with hakone grass (*Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola')

Certain plants are more likely to bloom in the fall than others. Azaleas are particularly prone to flowering in the fall, as well as rhododendrons lilacs and hydrangeas have also been known to sprout a new flower or two. Many perennials will also rebloom in autumn, notably iris, candytuft (*Iberis*), primrose, coral bells (*Heuchera*) and many types of salvia.

Growers are quick to capitalize on reblooming varieties. Encore™ azaleas are aggressively marketed as shrubs that will bloom twice each year. The Endless Summer™ series of hydrangeas is another good example. These varieties have the potential to become the new standard in for ornamental plant performance. Consider trying a reblooming variety the next time you plant a spring-blooming shrub.

FEATURED TREE

FICUS CARICA

Few fruits can compare with the fresh fig for flavor and sweetness. A tree-ripened fig warm from the September sun is a treat that is hard to forget. Fig trees are also attractive ornamentally. As members of the mulberry family (*Moraceae*), they have the characteristic mitten shaped leaves, and branch profusely to the point of becoming a giant shrub. Some gardeners allow the tree to grow this way as it requires less maintenance and provides an abundance of fruit within easy reach. Others prefer to limb up the tree and keep the trunk clear of branches. In warm regions, figs can grow to 30 feet tall and even wider, but in Northeast Ohio it will not get much larger than eight feet tall and wide.



‘Brown Turkey’ figs waiting to ripen

Figs are not hardy on the North Coast, but it is possible to grow them here with some winter protection. Although there are many varieties of fig, choose the most cold hardy variety you can find. ‘Brown Turkey’ is a good one, and the kind that I have in my garden. You will not get a lot of fruit from your tree, but it is definitely worth growing. During the summer, all you need is a location that gets six or more hours of sun per day, but make plans for winter care.

There are a number of ways to keep the tree alive through the winter. The simplest is to grow it in a large pot and bring it indoors in the winter. Figs have lots of roots, so use the largest container you can. A two-foot diameter pot the size of a half whisky barrel is a good start. If your plant room is very warm through the winter, move the plant indoors by the end of September. If the plant room is fairly cold, let the tree stay outdoors until the time of the first frost to help it adapt to colder temperatures. This method of winter protection will let you grow any type of fig you want, but it requires a tremendous amount of space.

The second option is to bury the tree underground for the winter. Once the leaves have fallen off the tree, dig a trench in the ground that is at least as long as the tree is tall. Line it with straw, dry leaves, newspaper, or other insulating materials. Next, dig up the tree’s roots on the opposite side from the trench so the whole tree can be tilted over into the trench. It may be necessary to tie the branches up so they fit in the trench. Cover the tree with another layer of straw, leaves or insulating material, and then cover the trench with a waterproof tarp. Finally, bury the tarp under the soil that was removed from the trench. The tree should remain protected from the coldest winter temperatures, and will be ready to unearth the following May.

If your soil routinely becomes waterlogged over winter, the tree may rot underground. In that case, try protecting the tree above ground after the leaves come off in the fall. Create a cage around the tree out of wire cloth or stakes and burlap. Fill the cage with dry insulating materials just as in the trench. Wrap the cage in a waterproof tarp, and cover the top with a waterproof cap. It is critical that the insulation is kept dry throughout the winter or it will lose its

insulating properties and it will allow fungus to rot the tree. Unwrap the tree in May on a cloudy or rainy day so the tissues are not burned by sudden exposure to harsh sun. It won't be long before the buds swell and the new foliage emerges.

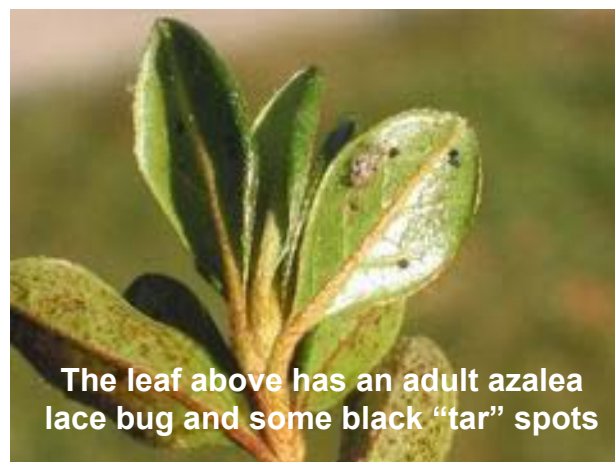
Figs can produce two crops of fruit per year. Unless you can house the tree indoors for the winter, it is unlikely you will be able to enjoy the spring crop as their fruits begin to develop on the previous year's growth in autumn. The small fruits, even if they remain after the long winter, always seem to drop off soon after the leaves begin to grow. Since I don't expect to get the spring crop, I usually prune the branches hard, back to the main stem and short, six inch branch stubs. This will not harm the tree, and makes it smaller and therefore easier to protect. New stems quickly sprout from dormant buds in the bark, and you will be surprised at how quickly it grows.

FEATURED INSECT

LACE BUG

Gardeners with azaleas have been fighting a pest that is fairly common but not well known among the general populace: the azalea lace bug (*Stephanitis pyriodes*). Azalea lace bugs feed on azaleas by piercing into the underside of the leaf with their mouthparts and drinking out the plant juices. This damage results in a tiny yellow or whitish speck that is visible on the top of the leaf. Continued feeding produces more and more of these specks until the leaf looks as if it were sprayed with a fine mist of paint. The underside of the leaf shows shiny black spots that resemble tar, but they are actually the waste of these insects. The insects themselves may be present, but they are often overlooked at first because they are very small (about 1/8

inch) and light-colored, and their lacy wings give them the appearance of a small flake of transparent film.



The leaf above has an adult azalea lace bug and some black "tar" spots

Damaged azaleas, even evergreen azaleas, will lose their damaged leaves during the winter. The plant will releaf in the spring, though the plant may appear sparse and leggy. The plant will usually bloom, but with fewer and smaller flowers. Continued infestation and feeding saps the reserves of the plant, causing a slow decline. The stressed plant is often attacked by other pests and diseases, eventually killing the plant after a few years.

Azalea lace bugs over winter as eggs that have been inserted into the leaves. Nymphs hatch in May and go through several moltings until they become adults by July, when they produce a second generation of lace bugs. In some years, a third generation may hatch before killing frosts reduce the adult population.

There are several ways to control lace bugs. Azaleas and rhododendrons planted in the shade are less susceptible to damage from these insects. Plants that already have lace bugs may be helped by spraying the bugs off the leaves with a sharp jet of water, or by spraying the undersides of the leaves with insecticidal

soap. These techniques require frequent and careful inspection of the plant, especially in May, July and September. It is also important to achieve thorough coverage of the leaf undersides with the water spray or soap. A more convenient solution is to protect the plants with a spring soil drench of imidacloprid. One treatment will protect the plant for the whole year, through all generations.

There are a number of different species of lace bugs and each have their preferred food source. These include the azalea lace bug, but also rhododendron lace bug (*Stephanitis rhododendri*), andromeda lace bug (*S. takeyai*), sycamore lace bug (*Corythucha ciliata*), hawthorn lace bug (*C. cydoniae*), hackberry lace bug (*C. celtidis*), oak lace bug (*C. arcuata*), and linden lace bug (*Gargaphia tiliae*). The hawthorn lace bug will attack many plants in the rose family including cotoneaster, pyracantha, flowering quince, crabapple, mountain ash and serviceberry (*Amelanchier*). The rhododendron lace bug may also feed on mountain laurels (*Kalmia*). In my garden, I use the preventative treatment with imidacloprid on all my azaleas, rhododendrons, andromedas (*Pieris japonica*) and cotoneasters. I have not had significant lace bug damage on any of the other plants lace bugs favor, but I keep an eye on them throughout the summer.

GARDEN CALENDAR

- Sow a cover crop when declining vegetables are cleared. They will stabilize the soil and add nutrients when tilled under in early spring.
- Pot up culinary herbs to bring indoors for winter cooking.
- Fertilize perennials for the last time this year.
- Divide and reset perennials before the month is out.
- This is your last chance to relocate perennials until spring.
- Sow grass seed by September 30th.
- Prepare room in your storage areas for garden furniture, tools and ornaments.
- Fertilize houseplants for the final time until next April.
- Lawns with compacted soil or over ½ inch of thatch should be core aerated when the soil is soft and damp.
- Compost non-diseased fallen leaves, clippings and garden debris.
- Let winter squash, pumpkins and gourds ripen on the vine, but harvest before frost.
- Harvest potatoes two weeks after tops die back.
- Keep up with your weeding. Fewer seeds this year mean fewer weeds next year.



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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