

# THE COASTAL Gardener



North Carolina  
Cooperative Extension

Spring 2007

## NC State University

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### New Hanover County Cooperative Extension's Coastal Gardener

program provides timely, researched-based horticultural information. This newsletter is part of county wide educational programs.

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## New Hanover County Arboretum Plant Focus

### No Yews is Good News

Folks who move into the hot and humid climate of southeastern North Carolina often lament that they can't grow the yews (*Taxus sp.*), spruces (*Picea sp.*) and firs (*Abies sp.*) that they grew "back home". It's true that most of these conifers (needle-leaved plants) don't do well here. But, if the idea of a garden with no conifers just doesn't seem like a "garden", you're in luck. In addition to the common junipers, try some of the interesting selections of Japanese cedar (*Cryptomeria sp.*) and Falsecypress (*Chamaecyparis sp.*)

The Japanese love to play with plants, so you'll find hundreds of selections of all of these heat-tolerant conifers listed. Rather than getting bogged down in all of those obscure cultivars, let's take a look at some of those that you can actually find at your favorite local nursery.

The most popular Japanese cedar in the trade is the large screening plant that has the same name as a famous flowering cherry – 'Yoshino'. Reaching 40' to 50' 'Yoshino' is a great replacement for the problematic Leyland cypress. A kissing cousin to 'Yoshino' is a selection made by a North Carolinian called 'Ben Franklin'. It's difficult for most of us to tell the two apart. A newer large selection called 'Radicans' is becoming popular in the nursery trade. Growers report that 'Radicans' holds its deep-green color better through the winter.

Even small gardens can use selections of Japanese cedar. 'Elegans Nana' (or 'Elegans Compacta') is one of my favorites. Only reaching 5 to 6 feet after many years, it boasts bluish green needles that develop a purplish tinge in winter. You may also want to consider 'Globosa Nana' that's similar in size but a bit more formal in appearance. Other medium-sized selections include 'Black Dragon' and



'Sekkan-sugi'. A bit of protection from the hottest sun will keep the yellow new growth of 'Sekkan' looking its best.

'Mops' is the name given to the most popular *Chamaecyparis*. Its drooping, yellow foliage does look a bit like a mop turned upside down when first planted. Give it time, though, and it will become an 8 to 10 foot pyramid of unrivaled garden interest. Place it in a specimen location where no pruning shear will ever be needed and you'll be the envy of the neighborhood. Other selections include 'Boulevard' whose soft-textured, blue needles may help you get over the fact that it holds lots of brown needles in its interior and Alaska-cedar (*Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*) that makes a bold, weeping statement in the landscape.

Both *Cryptomeria* and *Chamaecyparis* tolerate average soils in our area as long as it's doesn't stay wet consistently. Choose a planting location in full sun to light shade and avoid "limey" soils (high pH). After growing these heat and humidity-tolerant conifers for several years, you'll agree that "no yews is good news."

Al Hight



the arboretum  
NEW HANOVER COUNTY

# Pruning

## Pruning Ornamental Shrubs

Few gardening chores evoke so much apprehension as the task of pruning. When? Where? Why? How? – these are all questions which run through a gardener's mind as they stand in front of their intended victim, armed with an array of weapons of mass mutilation.

The question to start with is why. There are multiple reasons to prune – to promote flowering, to improve shape, to maintain size, or to keep plants healthy, but it is important to know that not all plants need to be pruned on a regular basis. Many shrubs have a naturally compact habit, such as 'Wheeler's Dwarf' pittosporum, dwarf nandinas, and 'Carissa' holly. The only pruning these plants require is to remove an occasional stray shoot or broken branch.

Other shrubs, such as privet, wax myrtle, abelia, and loropetalum grow large rapidly. Gardeners may try to keep these plants compact by pruning, but in the end it is just a matter of planting the wrong plant in the wrong place. If you have a shrub that constantly needs to be pruned because it is too large for the site, the best option is to remove it and replace it with a shrub whose mature size fits the site – a detail that should always be kept in mind when choosing plants for the landscape.

## Rejuvenating Overgrown Shrubs

Occasionally even an appropriately placed large shrub may need to be rejuvenated. Shrubs that have been neglected for years or have grown out of shape can be pruned back to within a few feet from the ground in late winter. When deciding how low to cut, remember that new growth is generally only going to occur within six inches to a foot of the pruning cut. Do not be afraid to cut plants back dramatically to avoid the appearance of a shrub on stilts.

Healthy shrubs will grow back with amazing vigor, but not all shrubs can be pruned this way. Shrubs that respond well to this treatment include camellias, hollies, privet, azaleas, and wax myrtle. Needled evergreens, such as junipers and arborvitae, should never be pruned this severely as they are unable to generate new growth buds on old wood.

## Shearing Hedges

Shearing is a pruning technique used to create a formal appearance and to maintain plants at a certain size. Many gardeners shear their hedges in early spring, but this is not the best time for that task. Pruning in late winter and early spring before new growth begins invigorates plants and promotes the production of profuse new growth – which is not the goal of shearing. Pruning in late spring and early summer, after the main spring growth flush, has the

opposite effect, and is the best time to shear. One more important note for sheared hedges – always shape them so that the bottom of the plant is wider than the top. Otherwise, the top will shade out the bottom, leading to naked trunks and branches on the lower portion of the hedge.

## Increasing Flowers

Another common reason to prune is to increase flower production, but the best time to do this depends on which shrub you are pruning. Shrubs that flower in the spring form their flower buds on the shoots and branches that grow each summer. Currently, those flower buds are swelling, just waiting for warmer temperatures to signal spring's arrival. If these shrubs are pruned now, all of the flower buds will be cut off, eliminating this spring's floral spectacle. The time to prune spring flowering shrubs, like azaleas, flowering quince, Forsythia, and climbing roses, is immediately after they finish flowering. A general rule of thumb as to what is considered spring flowering is any shrub that blooms before Mother's Day – though there are a few exceptions. Oakleaf and common hydrangea, Indian hawthorn, and Virginia sweetspire are all shrubs that bloom on old wood, but generally flower after Mother's Day. Wait to prune these until after flowering.

Shrubs that bloom in the summer produce their flower buds on new growth. Pruning them now will encourage lots of new growth, and lots of flower buds. Some summer flowering shrubs that are often pruned by cutting them back to near ground level each year include beautyberry, butterfly bush, Japanese spirea, chaste tree, and shrub roses (hybrid teas, floribundas, and grandifloras). Other summer flowering shrubs that should be pruned in spring if necessary include oleander, rose of Sharon, abelia, gardenia, nandina, and tea olive.

Find out more about pruning by referring to Extension's publication, Pruning Trees and Shrubs, available online at <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/agpubs/ag-071.pdf> or from your local Cooperative Extension office.

*Charlotte Glen*



# What is an Ability Garden?

An Ability Garden enables people with physical or mental challenges to participate fully in gardening activities.



The physical challenges could include lack of flexibility due to arthritis or other conditions; less hand/finger strength; reduced visual acuity; lack of accessibility for wheelchairs or walkers; or any other condition that creates barriers to traditional gardening.

How does a person who uses a wheelchair get close to his flower beds? How does a woman whose hands were weakened by a stroke rake leaves? How does anyone with arthritic knees get low enough to pull weeds?

Pathways made of concrete or large pavers allow wheeled access. Beside the pathways, raised beds make the plants more accessible. If a raised bed is not high enough, a table-height tub that a wheelchair fits under can be filled with soil and planted with herbs, flowers, perennials, and vegetables.

Tools can be adapted with wrist cuffs or hand clips – the gardener needs only to use the strength in her arms to pull a rake or dig with a trowel. Sometimes padding the handles, making the grips thicker and softer, is all that is necessary to adapt a tool for a weaker grasp.

People who are sitting on wheeled garden benches that double as tool holders can reach weeds or dead-head flowers without straining their knees. Extra long handles

on trowels, cultivators, and small rakes also bring the garden closer to the gardener.

Sometimes the physical challenges that people live with can lead to mental challenges as well: isolation, depression, and the loss of social skills. When a person learns how to adapt his garden to fit his needs, there is an immediate sense of well-being that pervades every aspect of his life. Grandparents discover new ways to spend time with their grandchildren. Young people can interact with other kids who have the same challenges and discover that there are a lot of things they can do very well. The pride that comes from taking care of a garden improves the gardener's self-esteem.

The Ability Garden at the Arboretum offers programs to address these needs. The programs are led by a Registered Horticultural Therapist who is trained in recognized therapeutic gardening methods for people with a wide range of physical or mental challenges. Our gardeners include people who have been referred by other agencies and members of the general public, including kids who participate in the summer camps.

Getting out in the garden is good for everyone, regardless of their physical or mental condition. Come visit the Ability Garden at the Arboretum, take a tour of our raised beds and examine our adapted tools. Learn how to make your home garden accessible again. Help yourself or someone you know get back in the garden where you belong!

*Beth Ann Scisco*



# Fresh Herb News



Do you use fresh herbs? Besides helping flavor foods when cutting back on salt, fat and sugar, herbs may offer additional benefits of their own. Researchers are finding many culinary herbs (both fresh and dried) have antioxidants that may help protect against such diseases as cancer and heart disease.

Purchase herbs close to the time you plan to use them. When growing herbs in your own garden the ideal time for picking is in the morning after the dew has dried but before the sun gets hot. This helps ensure storage quality.

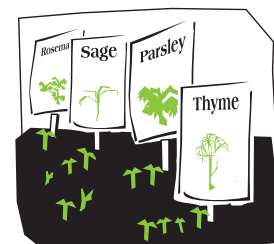
Fresh herbs can be stored in open or a perforated plastic bag in your refrigerator crisper drawer for a few days. If you don't have access to commercial perforated bags, use a sharp object to make several small holes in a regular plastic bag. Wash herbs in small amounts, under running

water when you are ready to use them. Shake off the moisture and pat dry with clean paper towels.

Unlike dried herbs, fresh herbs are usually added toward the end in cooked dishes to preserve their flavor. Add the more delicate herbs (basil, chives, cilantro, dill leaves, parsley, marjoram and mint) a minute or two before the end of cooking or sprinkle then on food before it's served. Less delicate herbs (dill seeds, oregano, rosemary, tarragon, and thyme) can be added about the last 20 minutes of cooking. Fresh herbs can be added to cold refrigerated foods several hours before serving. This allows flavors to blend.

For further information contact [dianne\\_gatewood@ncsu.edu](mailto:dianne_gatewood@ncsu.edu) (910-798-7663).

*Dianne Gatewood*



# Spring Events

## Annual New Hanover Master Gardener Plant Sale

March 30th -April 5th  
9 a.m – 6 p.m.  
Monies from this event benefit  
New Hanover County  
Arboretum, Cooperative  
Extension and affiliated educational programs.



Hundreds of plants for shoppers to choose from including perennials, annuals, herbs, Japanese maples, shrubs and trees! Most importantly, plants available at the plant sale have been selected to thrive in New Hanover County.

## Classes At the Arboretum

### Family and Consumer Sciences Shape-up for life

Thursday April 16, 23,30 & May 4,14,21; 6:00pm-7:00pm  
A six week nutrition and wellness class that enables participants to develop healthy lifestyles and become more physically active.

### Color Me Healthy

May 26th & October 7th  
Training for day care employees or other adults who work with 4 & 5 year old children. This class encourages healthful eating and physical activity.



### Classes to be held at the Arboretum

To register or for more information on these and other Family and Consumer Sciences classes contact Dianne Gatewood @ 910-798-7663 or [dianne\\_gatewood@ncsu.edu](mailto:dianne_gatewood@ncsu.edu)

## New Hanover Consumer Horticulture

### Turf Tips

Wednesday, March 21, 6:30-8:00 pm  
Frustrated or confused by southern turf? This session will de-mystify the secrets of good-looking turf.

### Edible Landscaping

Thursday, April 19th 6:30-8:00 pm  
Discover where art and science merge to create a landscape that tempts both the stomach and eye.

### More Time for “Me” Landscapes Plants

Thursday, April 26th, 6:30-8:00pm  
Looking for plants that look good with minimal upkeep? This Class will help you discover them!

### Gardening in New Hanover County – What Makes Us Unique?

Thursday, May 17th, 6:30-8:00pm  
Recently Relocated? Need to know what makes gardening in Wilmington different? This session is for you!

For More Information regarding these classes  
Call Ken Wells @ 798-7674 or  
E-mail [ken\\_wells@ncsu.edu](mailto:ken_wells@ncsu.edu)



### Master Naturalist Program

This pilot program will parallel the Master Gardener Program, both are volunteers where students are presented with opportunities to learn and give back to society and both will be taught this fall. The master Naturalist program will focus on the unique ecosystems located in the Cape Fear Basin.

This initial offering will be a combined Pender and New Hanover Counties classes; classes will be taut at Popular Groove and The New Hanover Arboretum. Pender Counties residents who wish to resister to obtain information this July such call the Pender county Extension Office @ 25 or E-mail Charlotte Glen @ [Charlotte\\_Glen@ncsu.edu](mailto:Charlotte_Glen@ncsu.edu)

New Hanover county residents should call 798-7660 or E-mail Ken Wells @ [Ken\\_Wells@ncsu.edu](mailto:Ken_Wells@ncsu.edu)

**The Coastal Gardener Newsletter** is funded by the New Hanover County Master Gardener Association through proceeds from their annual plant sale and is part of the educational outreach of New Hanover County Cooperative Extension. To learn more about the Master Gardener Association or Cooperative Extension's educational programs in New Hanover County, visit our website at <http://newhanover.ces.ncsu.edu>.

# Spring Events



## Master Gardener Program

This volunteer program teaches and promotes environmentally friendly and aesthetically pleasing landscaping techniques to enrich one's life and the community. Classes will begin August 9th, 2007.

To Apply or receive more information Call 798-7660 or E-mail [ken\\_wells@ncsu.edu](mailto:ken_wells@ncsu.edu)

## The Incredible (Not Just Edible) Oyster: March Speaker Series

During the month of March, Airlie Gardens will be hosting several events aimed at oyster education and restoration. An Oyster Speaker Series, featuring oyster experts, scientists, and aficionados, will take place on Saturday March 24th from 10:00am to 12:00pm. Coastal residents are encouraged to attend these free talks to learn how oysters affect life on the coast and what can be done to help protect declining oyster populations.

## Wilmington Chapter 212 of Ikebana International

Invites you to attend its Silver Anniversary Demonstration of Flower Arranging by Betty Taylor Sub-Grand Master of the Ohara School of Ikebana from McLean, Virginia

When:  
April 19, 2007 from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Where:  
New Hanover County Arboretum Auditorium

Fee:  
\$25.00 at the door

All are welcome to attend and learn from this highly accredited Ikebana teacher.



## Master Gardener Association Meetings

Monday, April 16th,  
10:30am-12:00pm  
Speaker – Evan Folds owner of Progressive Gardens, a store specializing in hydroponics and organic products.

Monday, May 16th,  
10:30am-12:00pm  
Speaker – Melanie Doyle, horticulturalist for the Fort Fisher Aquarium. Melanie is always a wealth of information on subjects like seashore gardening, low impact pest management in the home, and native-landscapes.

**Join Us!**

## EARTH DAY 2007



## 2007 Lower Cape Fear Earth Day Celebration

Saturday, April 21st  
Noon until 6pm  
Hugh MacRae Park.

This Years theme "The Heat Is On " Over thirty environmental exhibits will be on display representing various agencies. Tidal Creek Cooper and Mellow Mushroom will offer food and organic beer. Entertainment will include music ranging from funk to bluegrass and a Kid's Eco-Zone.

## The Wilmington Hobby Greenhouse Club Spring Plant Sale

Friday, Saturday, and Sunday  
April 13th, 14th, & 15th  
2318 Metts Ave., Wilmington.  
For more information Call Richard Buggeln at 509-1792 or go to [www.hobbygreenhouseclub.org](http://www.hobbygreenhouseclub.org)

# Mulch Mysteries



If a recent stroll around your yard left you wondering if something had died in the shrubbery then your landscape may be home to a harmless fungus known as the octopus stinkhorn or dead man's fingers (*Clathrus columnatus*). This small, foul smelling mushroom is not damaging to plants, people or pets, though the smell can be overpowering and unpleasant. The octopus stinkhorn appears during mild, damp weather and is one of several types of mysterious fungi that occasionally grow in hardwood mulch or wood chips.

On the whole, wood and bark mulches are very beneficial for landscapes, conserving water, moderating soil temperature, suppressing weeds, and adding organic matter and nutrients to the soil as they break down. Mulches and soils are alive with millions of microorganisms that work to decay organic matter and release nutrients, including many types of beneficial fungi and bacteria. From time to time, some of the more noticeable of these organisms may catch a gardener's attention and cause them to wonder about their identity.

## Did the dog do it?

Most eye-catching of all is a type of slime mold commonly referred to as dog vomit. This mat-like growth usually begins as a small area a few inches across but can rapidly grow to up to three feet in diameter and may be bright yellow or orange, fading to brown and tan as it dries. Slime molds do not harm plants and usually dry up within a few days of forming. One of their more curious characteristics is that they are actually able to move, up to two or three feet a day. They are more common in this area in early spring. If their appearance is offensive, they can be scooped up and added to the compost or thrown away.

## The nose knows!

The stinkhorns are a group of mushrooms most people smell before they see. The octopus stinkhorn previously mentioned, is one of the most putrid, emitting the odor of decaying flesh. The name octopus stinkhorn is very descriptive of this curious mushroom, which looks like an orange octopus or squid popping up out of the mulch. Other types of stinkhorns take on a more x-rated appearance, and have caused quite a stir at times due to their resemblance to a part of the male anatomy. All stinkhorns grow from egg-like sacks that can be found in the mulch they inhabit. The stinkhorn and the egg-like sack are the reproductive parts of a larger body mass, which is made up of white, thin threads known as hyphae. Removing the eggs or stinkhorns does not get rid of the fungus because the majority of its body is left behind.



## What to do

Most of the mushrooms and molds commonly found in mulch are harmless and do not require treatment. The nuisance growths mentioned in this article are most common on hardwood bark mulches and wood chips. Fresh wood chips or sawdust should never be used in the landscape, but should be allowed to age at least six months or be composted thoroughly before using as a mulch or soil amendment. If nuisance fungi are causing a problem in your landscape, switching from hardwood mulch to pine bark mulch or pine straw can help. Simply putting new mulch on top of existing mulch will not solve the problem though and can cause new problems because mulch applied too deeply (over 3") can lead to other issues. Watering hardwood mulch well when it is first applied can discourage the growth of nuisance fungi by encouraging beneficial bacteria. Overall there is little that can be done to eliminate nuisance fungi and mold from landscape mulches other than allowing nature to run its course and waiting for these growths to disappear.

*Charlotte Glen*

# Spring Calendar

## March

- Resist the temptation to fertilize lawns as they begin to green-up. Turf should not be fertilized until mid-April or May. See the appropriate 'Lawn Maintenance Calendar' on the web at <http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/> to find out the correct time and amount to fertilize your lawn.
- Divide fall and late summer flowering perennials in March as they wake up from winter's rest.
- Begin hardening off warm season transplants like tomatoes and peppers. Set plants outside for several hours a day, gradually increasing time over the course of a couple of weeks.
- Install woody plants into the garden this month and in April, allowing them a couple of months to become established before summer's heat.
- March is a good time to test and calibrate irrigation systems.
- Based on soil test results, apply coated or slow release fertilizers to flowers/woody plant beds. Soil test supplies are available from local Cooperative Extension Centers.

## April

- Prune spring flowering shrubs such as azaleas in April and May after they flower.
- Mow turf three times before applying fertilizers.
- As the threat of frost passes, plant summer/fall flowering bulbs like dahlias, cannas, and lilies.
- As soil temperatures warm seed, sod, or plug warm season turf.
- Plant warm season vegetables after April 15th — the last unofficial frost date.



Pests in the landscape will begin to show their buggy eyes and antenna as soon as we thaw out of winter's chill. Many of us are eager to get a jump on the pest problems with a pre-emptive pesticide strike. But not all insects in the yard are harmful; actually many are important members of a healthy functioning ecosystem. In

fact, only about three percent of all insect species are considered pests. Even insects we traditionally think of as "bad", like earwigs and termites do have a function in the environment. Both of these insects are considered "macro-decomposers" and they begin the process by which plants are broken down and become humus or "compost". Humus and compost is basically the same thing. Humus is organic matter which has broken down to a state that is relatively stable. We are all aware that compost is a wonderful amendment for garden beds. Without insects like earwigs and termites and a host of others, we would be up to our necks in trees, leaves and grass clipping. These macro-decomposing insects chew on plant material making it much easier for bacteria and fungi to finish the job.

A couple of simple tips can help you make sure that insects like macro-decomposers and beneficial insects don't succumb to friendly fire.

### Don't Nuke the Garden

Spraying pesticides on a regular schedule will kill all the good guys and leave only tough insect pests. Pests usually have multiple generations each season and can build resistance to pesticides quickly if these pesticides are overused. Remember, no yard will be 100% insect free, so you'll be wasting time and money trying.



### Begin a landscape scouting program

Simply walk around the yard twice a week. Make note of plants that don't look as good as they have in the past. These are the plants that need to be re-inspected the next time. If plants seem to get worse after a couple of visits, it's time to do a little investigation. If the plant issue is stumping you the New Hanover Plant Clinic can help. Call 910-798-7680

### Keep a garden log

Behind scouting, a log is the single most important concept in pest management. Good records lead to good planning. Pick up an extra calendar at the beginning of the year. Make garden notes on that calendar. Keep the calendar in the garage and hang on to it for a couple of years. Look at this calendar before you go out and scout for the day because it gives you an idea of the landscape's past history and a heads up on the pest du jour.

### Spot spray as much as possible

This concept is simple; spray only the plant affected by a pest. If azalea lacebugs are targeting your azaleas, spray the azaleas that are infested. Don't spray every azalea in the landscape.

### Use the least toxic product possible

or use a pesticide with a very short lifespan in the environment. The University of Florida has a great handout available online that discusses the pluses and minuses of several "Greener pesticides", <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN197>. A versatile pesticide is horticultural oil. It has low toxicity and if used correctly, almost no life span in the landscape.

Two useful websites for keeping up with pest activity around the state are Turfiles <http://www.turfiles.ncsu.edu/> and Pest news [http://ipm.ncsu.edu/current\\_ipm/pest\\_news.html](http://ipm.ncsu.edu/current_ipm/pest_news.html).

*Ken Wells*

### May

- Prune spring flowering shrubs this month -- these include azaleas, forsythia, quince and spring flowering spireas.
- The middle or end of May is the time to de-thatch or vertically mow warm season lawns.
- Remove the leaves of spring flowering bulbs when they turn brown and die.
- Blossom-end rot caused by a lack of calcium is a common malady of earliest tomatoes. To prevent this, lime according to soil test recommendations. For extra insurance apply one cup of calcium sulfate (gypsum) around each plant as the first fruits begin to form. Keep soil evenly moist with irrigation and organic mulches. For more information visit <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-28-d.html>
- For information on the cultural requirements, diseases and insects of warm season turf grasses visit <http://www.turfiles.ncsu.edu/>.

*Ken Wells*



## Decline in Trees What Does Tree Stress Look Like?



Urban trees have conditions that may be less than ideal for individual species. The soils may be mixed with native and non-native, may be compacted, may have pH extremes, may have poor water movement, or poor water holding capacity. Other factors may include air pollution, drought, mechanical injury, soil compaction, poor pruning, reflective heating, loss of canopy coverage for understory trees, and improper tree selection for the location.

Once these difficult conditions take effect on the tree, reserves of manufactured sugars are utilized to attempt to make up for the losses. Then with less than the normal ability to resist disease, the diseases set in, further encumbering efficiency. Decline begins with a slightly thinner canopy, usually goes without notice, and represents a 30-50% loss of foliar density. You might notice it in the summer when the shade is now dappled with light under a tree that use to create solid consistent shade.

The next most notable stage is the dieback of the twigs at the top of the canopy. This is clearly visible with leafless

branches protruding from the top of the canopy. The farthest points from the roots exhibit the symptoms of stress when the factors involved have constricted the ability to conduct water. The latter stages of decline are obvious to most; the canopy is greatly thinned, some water sprouts have emerged from the trunk and major limbs, and the overall appearance is a weak tree.

Many if not most of the problems start with the roots. Foliar disease is less likely to be the cause of decline but rather a symptom of it. Correcting the water relations and assuring the proper nutrition levels (soil testing and fertilization) is a wise investment where urban trees can increase the retail value of the home 20%.

Take a good look at your trees and address the issues early on before those twigs start dying at the top, as soon as the canopy is less dense than you believe the tree is normally capable of producing.

*Brion Capo*



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