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Persistent Creativity

Our Spring Focus:

- Fertilizing trees & shrubs
- Planting summer color
- Mulching & pruning
- Applying fertilizer & pre-emergent on turf
- Continuing storm repairs & installs



IT'S A TIME FOR NEW GROWTH

Spring is finally beginning to make an appearance in our beautiful coastal region – and none too soon! This past winter felt especially cold, but the flowers are bursting, the trees are budding, and Wilmington is gearing up for the annual Azalea Festival. Founded in 1948 by the legendary Hugh Morton, the Azalea Festival announces spring with the pageantry and flair that we Southerners do so well. At North State Gardens, we are also growing our community relationships, especially in the area of fostering education and awareness. The importance of small business involvement in the local community cannot be overstated. This quarter, we would also like to praise the beauty and benefits of a coastal meadow garden. Low maintenance and totally sustainable, coastal meadows are dynamic habitats with rich populations of plants that help attract birds and pollinators alike.



Dear Friends,

After an extreme year of weather in 2018, we finally caught a break this winter. It has been fairly mild and the plants seem to be waking up to spring right on schedule. As I look out my office window I see a bed of Formosa Azaleas approaching peak bloom ... right on time for the Azalea Festival this weekend!

Spring is always a hectic time in the landscaping business, but this year is shaping up to be one for the record books. We have been able to get a head start on the repair work from last year's storm, but we still have a good bit to do. The native maritime forest trees took a hit from the wind, and we will soon be able to tell what is going to survive and what is not. In some cases, we are trying to boost the spring flush of growth by broadcasting a bit of fertilizer in the natural areas.

Another after-effect of the storm is an extreme shortage of sub-contractor availability whether it is carpenters, masons or electricians. Prices on plants have risen quite a bit since the end of the recession, but supply has held up for most things. Live Oaks of the size we like to use on our jobs are a notable exception. We used to have local suppliers with good selections of Live Oaks, but now we are looking to South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida for more of our trees.

As we slip into summer, I start thinking about lush displays of flowers and tropical foliage plants. Our horticulture team, led by Ben and Mel, have placed their orders for summer flowers and have planned the annual plantings for the year. There is still time, however, to let us know if you would like some summer color. I have found that the large-leaved elephant ears like *Alocasia 'Calidora'* [pictured R] and Red Banana trees can be very useful not only as tropical accents but as screening plants for pool areas, outdoor lounging areas, or any outdoor space. These tough plants last until frost and have the added benefit of being very deer resistant!

Probably the most common request from clients as I start a landscape plan is for a low-maintenance yard. Later on, we will talk about 'coastal meadows' which have become one of my go-to low-maintenance features. We will also visit with one of our most recognizable faces at NSG, Bryan Padgett.



So, here's to spring and all of the beauty it brings! And as always, thank you for your continued support.

Matthew

BUILDING COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS



You've all likely seen statistics stating the importance of small businesses to local communities – they generate jobs, and small business owners often donate their time, energy and money to civic and non-profit organizations. At North State Gardens, we believe that education is key to building a stronger and more vital community, and our work with the Landscape Gardening and Horticultural Science program at Cape Fear Community College reflects this belief.

Through our partnership with the college, we have developed an annual scholarship, created a summer internship program, and organized field trips and guest lectures for students. We also frequently hire our summer interns because they already have a leg-up on the competition! Furthermore, multiple studies have found that both employee morale and retention increase when a business is engaged with the community.

Investing in education is a long-term project, but we feel it is hugely important to the future of sustainable landscaping in our region. Building lasting community relationships is a win-win situation for everyone involved.



CFCC Landscape program student pouring over NSG project designs at a recent presentation. The students also brought in their own drawings for Matthew to review.

“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”

- Margaret J. Wheatley, author of Leadership and the New Science. Wheatley’s books address how we can work together to strengthen our communities.

A COASTAL MEADOW GARDEN - NATURALLY

Low-maintenance is the first thing people mention when we talk about new landscape plans, and sustainability is always a goal for me as a designer. I use the term “coastal meadow” to describe mass plantings of native grasses and sometimes wildflowers. These plantings are useful as an alternative to lawns or where there are large open areas where lawns and other groundcovers are not practical or desirable.

There are many advantages to considering a coastal meadow landscape. A meadow is fairly inexpensive to install as we start with small plants spaced 2’ to 3’ on center. These lush plants do not require mowing, although we do cut them back once per year in some cases. The plants also do not require irrigation after establishment, and they never need pesticide treatments or other chemicals as they are already uniquely adapted to our local environmental conditions. In another huge plus, native grasses and wildflowers provide food and shelter for many species – including birds and butterflies.

Some species of grasses we typically use are pictured here: *Spartina patens* or Saltmeadow cordgrass [top R] a flood-tolerant coastal native naturally present at many waterfront properties. *Muhlenbergia capillaris*, or Pink Muhley Grass [middle R] a highly ornamental North American native with pink cloud-like plumes in October. *Eragrostis elliottii* ‘Wind Dancer’ or Wind Dancer Love Grass, [bottom L and R] a drought-tolerant North American native with a nice blue-green color and slim stems topped with panicles that ‘dance’ in the breeze. Many of our native plants are beautiful, sustainable, and practically maintenance free!

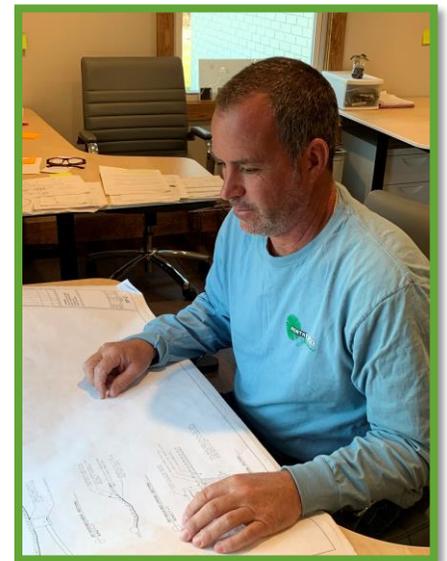


A SOLID AND STEADY PRESENCE



Bryan Padgett, North State Garden's experienced and highly respected Landscape Installation Manager, has been with the company for longer than he can remember. Bryan studied Environmental Science at UNC-W and Landscape Architecture at the University of Arkansas, but this Holly Ridge native was drawn back to life in coastal Wilmington. He started working for North State Gardens after having met founder David Erwin through a client, and in Bryan's own words the learning curve was steep. "I had no idea what I was getting into," he says of the early days. "I'm thinking that landscaping is clearing lots and bulldozing trees, not beautifying yards!" The company was small then, and everyone worked at all the different jobs. "I remember when Matthew [Erwin] and I would weed-eat and mow on Wednesdays. There were only about five of us total in the company." Early in his career, Bryan began working closely with Maintenance Manager Ben Kennedy, and to this day he sincerely appreciates that experience. "Having someone so knowledgeable helped me a lot. Ben was a good teacher."

Over the years, Bryan has discovered that he really enjoys the design part of his job. "I like the creativity, and if you take a job to installation, you get to see the results in 3D. Getting close to finishing a job is always a good feeling. There's a lot of prep work that doesn't look very pretty, but the end of the job looks great, and you can see the results of all the hard work." All design projects are interesting in different ways, but Bryan says that he enjoys transforming a small space the most. "Everything is right there. You can see all of the landscaping standing in one spot." As a person who values precision and attention to detail, Bryan says the hardest part of his job may be in getting others to work to his standards. "I can be a bit of a perfectionist, and in landscaping that is probably the hardest thing to deal with. But over the years, we have developed certain methods of doing things that work very well, that have good results."



As for the evolution of the company, Bryan agrees that NSG is a major factor in landscaping in the Wilmington area. "We cover a larger scope of work now than ever before, with Turf Geeks lawn science and all the experienced professionals on our team. We can offer our clients a lot more these days." Spring being the busiest time for landscapers, Bryan is already working hard to maintain beautiful spaces and to transform new areas. 2019 is bustling and already growing gorgeous!