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See nature from an unhurried perspective

Nature doesn't sleep - it just moves a bit more slowly through these cold months. The birds are huddled in the shrubs, the caterpillars are cocooning as they wait until spring to become beautiful butterflies and the insects are pupating or spending their cold months in amazing egg masses that will hatch when the warmth returns.

The world is slower but still active, and it offers us a wonderful opportunity to see nature from an unhurried perspective and be astonished anew by the ingenuity of plants and animals. The winter season reminds us that each species lives differently and can manage different circumstances. For example, many evergreens can adjust their systems to withstand higher pressures from expanding cold water. This is a useful trick as you recall that water expands when it freezes and a plant has no option to warm itself up. The plant, simply and miraculously, adjusts to the changing conditions.

Birds, mammals, and insects have a diversity of responses and adaptations with which to meet the changing seasons. Some migrate to warmer climes, some hibernate at a low body temperature through the cold weather, and still others rotate into a different life stage to manage the sinking temperatures. Eastern tent caterpillars lay their eggs in one mass each fall, with each deposit forming a ring around a tree twig. The eggs are encased in a foam-like substance that hardens and attaches to the twig but withstands the season's coldest temperatures. Why? Because the foam contains glycerol, an antifreeze chemical once commonly used in our car radiators. This glycerol is mostly used up by spring time, when the larvae hatch and begin spinning their tent-like web.

Discoveries and wonder can only happen if you are there to witness the event. Sarah P. Duke Gardens will offer a class in winter botany Jan. 23 & 30 from 1-4 p.m. for students interested in identifying plants in their winter appearance.

We will also visit the Eno River this winter to study the geology of the Piedmont. The class, "Geology: The Ecology of Change," is scheduled for Feb. 9 and 16 and March 9 from 6:30 to 9 p.m., with a field trip March from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

To take advantage of one of the most fascinating times of year, the crossover period between winter and spring, we'll offer another new course, "Spring Awakening: Close-up Photography Strategies," on March 26 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Where better to train your lens than the Gardens, as plants begin to expand their buds, the first flowers and butterflies

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Come see the "WOW!"

at WinStar's Brightwood Trails

Story by REBECCA R. NEWSOME, MIRM

"We're thrilled to include WinStar 'Wow!' in every home at Brightwood Trails," said Cindy Morris, Vice President of WinStar Homes. "We want our customers to enjoy the very best home they can buy in their price range. Our goal is to consistently deliver homes with loads of upscale features and thoughtful extras that make buyers feel good about where they live. At WinStar Homes, we're proud of our craftsmanship and attention to detail, and we believe our customers deserve to have that same feeling of pride. While our competitors are whittling down their included features so they can promote discounted prices, our homes are loaded, at an affordable price, every day. WinStar homes are simply more 'Wow!' for the money."

Stephanie Gaither Harris, a Durham Realtor® with Coldwell Banker Howard Perry and Walston for the past ten years, agrees. "It's been a long time since a builder has excited me so much," Harris said. "I've toured the beautiful homes at Brightwood Trails... The quality of WinStar construction surpasses everyone else in this price range. What other builders consider upgrades are standard features in homes by WinStar. I'm very impressed."

Brightwood Trails is located in Durham off Sherron Road, less than seven miles to both Research Triangle Park and Brier Creek and only nine miles to Duke University Medical Center. The neighborhood by WinStar Homes features 3 - 4 bedroom / 2 - 3 bath homes ranging from 1,520 - 2,400 square feet. Priced from the \$160s to the low \$200s, these cottage-style

homes are loaded with exceptional features such as covered front porches, patios, 2-car garages, 9' smooth ceilings, Kenmore® stainless steel appliances, 42" Aristokraft® kitchen cabinets with cabinet crown molding, and owner's bath adult-height vanities. These details name only a very few of the many outstanding inclusions in Brightwood Trails' homes. In fact, in the recent Parade of Homes' event sponsored by the Home Builders Association of Durham, Orange, and Chatham Counties, all three WinStar Homes' entries in Brightwood Trails won awards - Two Gold and one Silver.

In addition to beautiful and durable building products and materials, homes in Brightwood Trails also include numerous energy-saving features. Energy Star® low-e argon gas insulated windows and 50-gallon water heaters combine with gas heat, Honeywell® programmable thermostats, and other carefully selected products to provide cost effective, energy efficient homes.

Frequently noted upon arrival in Brightwood Trails are the large, professionally landscaped homesites throughout the community. Not only are front yards, side yards, and up to 15' in rear yards fully sodded; the remainder of the rear yard is seeded and strawed. Completing the streetscape is the installation of a handsome landscaping package with every home.

Brightwood Trails offers an excellent RTP/Brier Creek location for homes of terrific value and affordability, with wonderful amenities to boot. "A community pool is coming in 2011 with lap lanes, conversations areas, and a mushroom fountain," said Morris. "We'll also have an upscale, open-air clubhouse, a fenced playground,

and a play field... All for very low, very reasonable home owner's association fees. Our location, amenities, and outstanding, quality-built homes have all come together to offer an extraordinary opportunity for anyone looking for a new home."

Headquartered in Raleigh, the leadership of WinStar Homes has continually demonstrated strong commitment to the industry and the community via active involvement in the local Home Builders Associations (HBAs) and various civic groups. WinStar President John Schlichenmaier is a Past President of the HBA of Durham, Orange, and Chatham Counties; other key employees have served in leadership positions on HBA councils and committees. As chief of a talented team of proven professionals, Schlichenmaier has been the recipient of the coveted "Builder of the Year" award on numerous occasions.

"WinStar Homes offers fresh design and a lot of square footage for the money," said Jim Harvey of Kolter Land Partners, the Tampa-based developer of Brightwood Trails. "We were impressed from the start with the expertise and vision of the WinStar Homes' team. We appreciate their commitment to excellence, and we feel confident they'll be very successful in Brightwood Trails."

To learn more about the WinStar "Wow!" at Brightwood Trails call (919) 381-6371 or visit www.winstarhomes.com.

Homes: A Refresher Course

Story by ELIZABETH RAZZI

Plenty of houses are old. Not all of them are tired. There is a difference. A well-kept, mindfully updated old home is a gem, whereas a neglected home can start to look shabby within a few years of construction. If you are trying to sell a victim of casual neglect, the resulting frumpiness will damage your sales price and can make it languish on the market. If you have no intention to sell, keeping your surroundings fresh and up-to-date offers its own reward.

We asked some pros - local home inspectors, designers and stagers, whose work takes them behind the curtains of a lot of homes - to tell us about the common signs of age and neglect that they encounter, along with some tips for updates.

Greenery is good - but not growing on the roof, bricks or siding. "Folks need to take care of the outside of a home before they take care of the inside," said Tim Bills, owner of Sentry Home Inspections. That includes trimming tree branches away from the house.

"If a tree overhangs the roof, it does not allow the sun to dry out the roofing materials," he said. "It can allow lichen growth, and those can deteriorate the shingles." He recommends leaving existing lichen alone, as trying to remove it with a scraper or pressure washer will damage the shingles.

Heavy shade can also foster growth of mold and mildew on siding and bricks. Usually the stains can be washed off vinyl or aluminum siding, but it's more of a problem with wooden surfaces, which can decay, Bills said.

Ivy growing up the walls may offer a pleasant Cotswold cottage effect, but it can speed decay. "English ivy is an invasive species; it

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Mystery Plant Series with John Nelson: "Red bay," *Persea palustris*

Those of you who are fond of eating guacamole have no doubt cut open an avocado at some point. An avocado fruit is a very good example of a fruit type called a *drupe*: such a fruit has a single seed inside, immediately embraced by a thin, papery coat, which is surrounded by pulpy tissue (this is the tasty, edible part) and then by a thin rind, on the outside. Drupes, as fruit types, are widespread among plants around us. A cherry is a drupe, so is a peach. Our mystery plant, a native species, has drupes for fruits, and although small (about one-half inch across) --and unsuitable for guacamole, they mature into a beautiful gun-metal shade of blue. This plant is actually a reasonably close relative of the cultivated avocado, which is a tropical species, but in the same genus.

You may see our plant in a variety of habitats, such as pocosins and Carolina bay margins, places mostly on the wet side. Its neighbors commonly include red maple, ti-ti, switch-

cane, gallberry, catbriers, and horse-sugar. It occurs commonly in nearly all of the coastal plain counties of the Southeast, from eastern Virginia all the way to Texas. It is a shrub, sometimes becoming a slender, branching tree. Its leaves are evergreen, lustrous on the upper surface, and equipped with a thin blanket of crinkled and tangly, reddish-gold hairs on the lower surface. The leaves are very resinous, and very spicily fragrant when crushed. In fact, the dried leaves of this plant make an excellent replacement for bay leaves, just in case your spice rack gives out.

The plants are frequently confused with Sweet-bay, or *Magnolia virginiana*. These two plants often grow together, and in a botanical haste, are sometimes confused for each other. The two are very easily separated, though. Sweet bay (the *Magnolia*) has a prominent whitish blush on the lower leaf surface, unlike the downy surface of our Mystery plant. Additionally, it turns out that

a certain tiny wasp species is fond of laying its eggs inside the leaf tissue of our Mystery plant, causing misshapen, corky galls to develop commonly on many of the leaves of a single individual. Such galls are never seen on Sweet-bay. (My students say that the wasp had a lot of gall to do that.)

Unfortunately, our Mystery Plant is now being seriously threatened by a fungus which is spread by yet another exotic insect. This disease is killing many thousands of plants

along the Southeastern coastal regions; current research being performed will hopefully come up with a way of halting the spread of the disease. (Photo by Linda Lee.)

John Nelson is the curator of the A. C. Moore Herbarium at the University of South Carolina, in the Department of Biological Sciences. As a public service, the Herbarium offers free plant identifications. For more information on this service, visit www.herbarium.org or call 803-777-8196.



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