

THE GARDENGOER

Volume 10, Issue 4

April 2008



Hi Everyone,

Today's rain has gently tucked in my newly planted garden and given Jim time for a rest from the roto-tiller. I feel a great sense of contentment (it could be exhaustion) also. I have one unplanted row out of 24 in my veggie garden. I just hope the armadillo roto-tiller doesn't do any extra cultivation in the area. The bluejays have been checking for cut worms in the area. I haven't figured out how the weeds sprout in under 24 hours and I have to wait 5-7 days for the crops to sprout. Mother Nature has such a strange sense of humor. I only have two blisters! Spring is here and I am glad. Happy digging everyone.

April will be our plant swap meeting and the MG state conference. Please plan to attend both. May is our scholarship presentation meeting. June will be tomato tasting. Opportunities to participate are everywhere.

Congratulations to everyone for another successful plant show. This event just keeps getting better every year. You all deserve a big pat on the back for all of the time and effort put forward to make this event the huge success it was. All volunteers were wonderful. Thank you for the support.

Now is the time to plant almost everything. So get with it. I would like to hear some garden tales. I am going to slowly walk up and down the rows with my weed bucket and see just how many seedlings -that I didn't plant- are in my garden. Aj



The Nitty Gritty of Composting **by Rusty Batty**

Many people are quite capable of taking care of their garbage. Just put in the plastic bag, take it to the road and it's gone. But occasionally there is some good stuff that goes to our landfill and I'm not talking about the car keys or your kids CD. It's the volume of organic matter (lawn clippings, leaves, straw etc.) that could be used to make excellent compost or mulch.

Strictly speaking, mulch is the coarser organic material and compost is the completely decomposed organic matter that makes up soil. There are many ways to start a compost pile. Using a static pile, bin or tumbler is very common. The pile or bin should be located in an out of the way area of the yard. The pile should be roughly 3 ft. high, 3 ft. wide and 3 ft. deep. Compost piles do best with layers of kitchen or yard waste. Chop or shred coarser yard materials if you want it to compost quickly. Along with the layers of organic matter, spread soil or "already done compost" over the pile. This layer contains the microorganisms that break down the pile. Occasionally add moisture to your pile if it gets too dry. The pile temperature should reach 90° to 140° F in four to five days. Stir the compost layer about once a week. Your completed compost should be ready to use in 6 – 8 weeks.

There is lots of educational information on basic composting at www.lsuagcenter.com. When you're through with these instructions, shred it and add to the pile.



Azaleas! Azaleas! Azaleas!

Vibrant colors are showing up all over Louisiana. It is Azalea (genus *Rhododendron*) time in Louisiana. Indian Azaleas (genus *Rhododendron indicum*) are covered with blooms 2-3 1/2 inches across. The Indian Azalea variety is the preferred ornamental plant in Louisiana landscaping. The height and spread can range from 6 to 10 feet, depending on the age and frequency of pruning of the specimen.

Nine of the most popular varieties are: Daphne Salomon, a compact grower of medium height, with salmon pink flower; Formosa Red, also called Dixie Beauty and a sport of Formosa; Fielder's White, with white flowers and a spreading growth habit; Formosa, the most popular azalea with magenta flowers and a very vigorous, upright growth; George I. Tabor, with bluish-pink flowers; Judge Solomon, similar to Formosa with rosy-pink flowers; Mrs. G.G. Gerbing, a sport of George L. Tabor with large white flowers and a spreading growth habit; President Clay, has a vigorous, upright growth pattern with smaller flowers than other Indian varieties, displaying an orange-red color; Pride of Mobile is a vigorous grower and watermelon-red flowers; and last but not least Southern Charm, also a vigorous grower has large, rosy-pink flowers and is sport of Formosa. The Formosa variety has an early flowering season while the other azalea varieties mentioned flower mid-season.

If you would love to enjoy this lovely flora in your own setting there are several things to take into account. Proper bed preparation should be one of your first considerations. The majority of the soil in our area is clay based so amending with sand and organic matter, such as pine bark, will certainly help to loosen the soil. Raising the bed 4 to 6 inches will help to provide for well-drained soil. Soil pH should be 5.0-6.0 with 5.0-5.5 being ideal and can be determined by conducting a soil test.

Since azaleas have a very shallow root system, they should be mulched to conserve soil moisture. Suggested material would be: pine straw needles, pine straw shavings, or pine bark mulch. When dealing with plants you will always encounter diseases and /or insects. Azaleas have the following that need to be kept in check: petal blight, leaf gall, root rot, spider mites, bark scale, lacebug, leaf miners and freeze injury. You

should contact our friendly, helpful and informative county agent for more advice. You can always bring a sample in if you are just not sure what the problem is or a phone call may be all that your concern requires.

- Submitted by Marie F. Porche

(Resource: LSU AgCenter Research website)

UPCOMING EVENTS

- April 5-6 - Spring Garden Show
City Park Botanical Gardens
New Orleans, LA
<http://neworleanscitypark.com/nobgcal.html>
- April 12 - Independence Park Botanic Garden Plant Sale
Baton Rouge, LA
8:00 am -1:00 pm
- Spring Stroll Garden Tour
St. Francisville, LA
abrock@agcenter.lsu.edu
- April 28-30 - Master Gardener State Conference
Holiday Inn
Covington, LA
Start collecting door prizes and raffle items for this upcoming conference. Items can be turned in to Fran Thigpen or bring them to the Master Gardener meetings. A flyer will be available at the next meeting to solicit donations. If you have any questions or comments, please contact Fran by phone at 985/892-3762 or e-mail at franthigpen@bellsouth.net
- May 9 - Gardener's Night Out
LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station
Hammond, LA
rbracy@agctr.lsu.edu or acoco@agctr.lsu.edu
- May 10 - East Baton Rouge LMG annual Mother's Day Plant Sale
LSU AgCenter Burden Center
8:00 am - 2:00 pm
rtrawick@agcenter.lsu.edu

FUTURE MEETINGS

St. Tammany Master Gardener meetings are held at the LSU AgCenter Office in Covington and begin at 10:00 a.m. Be sure to wear your name badge to the meetings to be eligible for the door prize. The next Master Gardener meetings will be:

- April 16 - Spring plant swap
- May 21 - Scholarship recipient awards meeting
- June 18 - Tomato tasting
- July 16
- August 20
- September 17
- October 15
- November 19

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
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