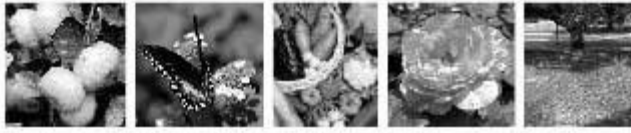


Horticulture Hints



Horticulture Hints

ST. MARTIN PARISH

Summer 2008

Vacation Plant Care

Summer is the time when people commonly take their longest vacations. If you are going to be away from home for more than a few days, you may return to find substantial damage has occurred to plants left unattended. This is especially true for plants growing in containers – both indoors and outside. The ideal solution is to ask a friend who is knowledgeable about plants to check on your plants regularly and water them when necessary. Be sure to give written instructions on the needs of each plant since your friend is not as familiar with them as you are.

If indoor plants are going to be on their own, move them away from sunny, bright windows so they use water less rapidly. Right before leaving on your trip, thoroughly water all of your indoor plants. Plants in small pots will tend to dry out the fastest. If you will be gone for more than a few days, enclose these plants (pot and all) in clear plastic bags to retain moisture and prevent drying out. Plants in plastic bags should receive bright light but no direct sun that could cause excessive heat buildup inside the plastic.

Group all of your outdoor container plants together in a shady location near the northern side of a building or under the protective cover of a large shade tree or covered patio, and water them thoroughly. If you'll be gone for more than a few days, inexpensive irrigation timers – available at local nurseries and hardware stores – can work very well hooked up to an irrigation system. It's probably easier to use a sprinkler to water a grouping of your container plants. But, if you wanted to be more sophisticated, drip systems are also available.

Water your home grounds very well prior to leaving, especially if there has been little rainfall. A thorough, slow soaking will provide a lasting supply of moisture. Make sure that you mulch all flowerbeds, vegetable gardens, shrub plantings and newly planted trees

Flowerbeds and vegetable gardens are particularly vulnerable to drought while you are away. To water automatically, place either soaker hoses or sprinklers to cover various beds and areas of your landscape. Connect them to hoses attached to a timer at each faucet you use for irrigation. Set the irrigation timers to come on twice a week and stay on long enough to thoroughly soak an area.

Gingers for the Summer Garden

As our landscapes languish in the summer heat, a wonderful group of plants called gingers thrive and delight us with bold foliage and attractive flowers.

Native to tropical or semitropical regions, gingers flourish in the heat, rain and

humidity. Despite their tropical origins, many gingers are hardy throughout the state and make excellent, permanent additions to the landscape. Gingers produce a thick, fleshy stem that grows at or just below the soil surface called a rhizome. With a good, thick mulch of leaves or pine straw, the rhizomes are easily protected during the winter. And if the top is killed by hard freezes, the rhizome will resprout in the spring.

The plants we call gingers actually include many genera with many different sizes, growth habits and flower shapes. Low-growing gingers, like *Kaempferia pulchra*, smaller species of *Curcuma* or *Globba*, make great groundcovers or clumps at the front of shady borders. Medium-size gingers 3- to 6-feet tall include species of *Curcuma*, *Hedychium* and *Costus*, and the shell ginger (*Alpinia zerumbet*) grows 10- to 12-feet tall. These larger gingers are excellent choices for accent, screens or at the back of a border.

In their natural habitats, most gingers grow under the canopies of trees in filtered light, although some grow in the open at the edge of water and in sunnier conditions. Most gingers will do best where they receive direct sun for about two to four hours a day, although shell ginger and some species of *Curcuma* and *Hedychium* will grow in full sun. When planting gingers into the landscape, choose a location with appropriate light and generously amend the soil with compost, well-rotted manure or peat moss and a light application of an all purpose fertilizer.

Consider planting some gingers in your landscape this summer. Their bold, tropical foliage, attractive flowers and, in some cases, wonderful fragrance will add a lot to your summer gardens.

Bark Lice are Harmless

You may be alarmed to see a thin film of silvery webbing over large areas of the bark of your trees in late summer. The webbing may extend from the ground up the trunk and into the branches. The insects that produce the webbing, bark lice or psocids, are harmless. They are scavengers and will not hurt the tree. No control is necessary.

Gardening With Children

By midsummer, many adults are thinking of ways to provide something for kids to do until school begins. Why not start a gardening project? You can introduce your youngsters to the joys of gardening and at the same time exercise their bodies and brains.

To be successful during the summer months, plant seeds or plants that will thrive in our hot, humid climate. A good selection of flowers, vegetables and herbs can be grown now. Whatever you decide to grow, start with a well-prepared bed, or, if gardening in containers, use a good potting soil and the proper-size container.

During bed preparation, explain to the child why you need to add fertilizer and organic matter to the soil. A simple answer would be that the fertilizer provides nutrients needed by the plant. You could compare a fertilizer to vitamins. Just as getting enough vitamins is important to our growth and health, fertilizers provide nutrients that make the plants more healthy and productive.

Mention that although we incorrectly call fertilizers “plant food,” plants make their own food through a remarkable process called photosynthesis. In this process plants absorb the energy of the sun, and use it to create the food they need to live and grow.

The organic matter also adds nutrients, but, more important, it improves the soil so the roots of the plants will grow better. The organic matter helps create air spaces and

aids in drainage of excess water from the soil. The air spaces allow oxygen to be present in levels needed to maintain a healthy root system. A loose soil also helps the roots grow through it easier.

Most kids are familiar with the recycling of aluminum, paper and glass. Introduce them to the recycling of organic yard waste through composting. Compost is a valuable soil amendment that you can easily make yourself with grass clippings, leaves and vegetable and fruit peelings from the kitchen. The LSU AgCenter has an excellent free brochure that will guide you in establishing a compost pile. Contact your local LSU AgCenter Extension office for a free copy.

You can start your plants from seeds or purchase transplants from local nurseries (try both ways). Flowers that will grow well in the summer include: angelonia, marigold*, zinnia*, periwinkle, portulaca, verbena, sunflower*, gomphrena, wishbone flower, balsam*, melampodium, pentas and cosmos* to name a few.

Vegetables you can plant now include Oriental-type eggplants, hot peppers, okra, sweet potato, banana pepper, "Gypsy" pepper, peanuts*, yard-long beans* and luffa*. The last two need something to climb on. Make a teepee out of bamboo stakes for the vines to climb on and the kids will love to sit inside.

I talk to so many gardeners who say that an adult introduced them to gardening when they were children. Gardening is one of the best ways to put children in touch with nature. Planting a few vegetables will help kids realize that food doesn't just appear on grocery shelves. Take some time, and open a child's eyes to the wonders of gardening.

* Plants easily grown from relatively large seed that children can handle when planting.

Vegetable Gardening

Vegetables to Plant in June. Transplant heat-set tomatoes for fruit production in August through October. Plant collards, cucumbers, melons, cantaloupes, okra, southern peas, pumpkins and summer squash. Transplant eggplants, all the peppers and sweet potato slips. Start seed of fall tomatoes and bell peppers. Good pest control practices are necessary because of the high pressure of insects and diseases now.

Vegetables to Plant in July. Transplant tomatoes and bell peppers in mid-July for fall production. Also, plant okra, southern peas, cucumbers, squash, cantaloupes, pumpkins and watermelons.

Mid- to late July. Seed broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, cabbage, collards and winter squash; transplant bell peppers and tomatoes.

August. This very hot time may experience damaging droughts. Start bush snap beans and bush limas. Plant seed for cucumber, collards, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, cabbage, Chinese cabbage, summer squash, southern peas, mustard and green shallot sets.

Mid-August. North Louisiana can plant Irish potatoes and start seed for head lettuce and beets. Transplant broccoli and Brussels sprouts.

Late August. South Louisiana now can do the above (mid-August).

Crop Highlights

Broccoli and Cauliflower. Both can be direct-seeded beginning in mid-July through September or transplanted from early August through early September. It takes four to six weeks to produce transplants from seed. In general, broccoli and cauliflower will require 5 to 6 pounds (or pints) of a complete fertilizer such as 8-24-24 per 100 feet of row.

These crops, especially cauliflower, require fast, continuous growth for proper head development. Keep them well watered and fertilized. Sidedress plants with three-fourths pound (1 ½ cups) of ammonium nitrate per 100 feet of row 3-4 weeks after transplanting and again in 14 days.

Varieties that will produce in about 60 days from transplanting reduce the chance of cold-weather damage. Recommended varieties are:

<u>Broccoli</u>	<u>Cauliflower</u>
Gypsy	Majestic
Decathalon	Cumberland
Everest	Wentworth
Marathon	Incline
Packman	White Passion
Premium Crop	Snow Crown
Patriot	Candid Charm

Snap Beans. Late August through early September is the best time to plant. Normally 50 to 55 days are required from planting until harvest. Don't let beans suffer from drought. Choose Provider, Bluelake 274, Roma II, Derby, Storm, Festina, Atlantic, Pod Squad, Bronco, Royal Burgundy, Green Crop, Hialeah, Strike or Gator Green. For a yellow wax bean, choose Golden Wax. Bush beans usually will produce more successfully than pole beans in the fall because of their earlier maturity.

Butter Beans. This crop is harder to produce in the fall than are snap beans. Plant early enough to produce before frost and late enough so they're not blooming while temperatures are too high for fruit set. Plant early August through about mid-August. Plant bush beans for fall production (Henderson, Baby Lima, Nemagreen, Fordhook 242, Thorogreen, Jackson Wonder, Dixie Butterpea).

Irish Potatoes. Plant small whole potatoes saved from the spring crop from about mid-August to early September. Good soil moisture is essential. The seed potatoes may not sprout readily after planting because of a physiological rest period of about 90 days that they have to go through after harvesting in the spring. After this rest period is satisfied, the tubers should sprout. Fall yields are lower than spring yields. Use seed potatoes for seed pieces.

Cabbage. Plant seed beginning in mid-July, and seed through September. You also may transplant beginning in early August through mid-October. Fertilize the same as broccoli and cauliflower. Space cabbage, cauliflower and Chinese cabbage about 12 to 14 inches

apart and broccoli 6 to 12 inches apart. Double drills (two drills of plants spaced 10-12 inches apart on single row) will help maximize yield. Try Rio Verde for late plantings. Recommended early maturity varieties include Green Boy, Stonehead (AAS) and Dynamo (AAS). Maturing a little later are Rio Verde, Solid Blue 780 Blue Vantage, Blue Thunder, Cheers, Vantage Point, Savoy Ace (AAS) and Savoy King (AAS).

Squash and Cucumbers. These two crops can be planted in June, July and August. Summer plantings will normally be ready to begin harvesting after about six weeks. Yields are usually lower than spring plantings. A fall crop of yellow summer squash, zucchini and cucumbers can be grown by planting seed in August. Squash vine borers may be a more severe problem in fall than in spring, so be prepared to control them with an insecticide. Viruses are a problem in the fall, so spray regularly to control insects that transmit them.

Pumpkins. Pumpkins for Halloween should be planted in early to mid-July. Apply 3-5 pounds of a complete fertilizer for each 100 feet of row before planting. Plant five to six seed in hills about 4 to 5 feet apart on rows 6 to 8 feet apart. Thin to one or two plants per hill. Apply a sidedressing of 1 pound (1 pint) of ammonium nitrate per 100 feet of row when vines begin to run. Keep soil moist for best production. Howden and Biggie are excellent varieties to grow for Halloween. The Connecticut Field is an old popular variety. Recommended varieties of giant pumpkins are Big Moon, Full Moon, Big Max, Atlantic Giant and Prize Winner. The medium-size varieties that have done well in research trials are Spirit, Lumina, Big Autumn, Gold Rush, Autumn Gold, Gold Bullion, Howdy Doody, Small Sugar and Oz. Frosty, Big Autumn, Neon, Magic Lantern and Aspen produce a dwarf vine that should be tried in home gardens. Many ornamental pumpkins like Jack-Be-Little, Baby Bear, Munchkin, Lil Ironsides and Baby Boo can be planted.

Greens. Begin planting greens, mustards, turnips and collards during August. Keep the soil moist to ensure a good stand. Try some of the white turnips, like White Lady, Tokyo Cross and Shogoin for roots and Seven Top, AllTop, Topper and Southern Green for greens. Also good are Just Right, Royal Crown and Purple Top WG.

Shallots. Dry sets of shallots can be planted from August to April. About 50 to 60 days from planting, tops will be ready to harvest.

Fall Bell Peppers. If plants from the spring are still in good condition, they can be nursed (sprayed or dusted and watered) throughout summer. They will set fruit again as the temperatures become more favorable. If seeds of bell peppers haven't been planted by early July, buy transplants.

Fall Tomatoes. Transplant fall tomatoes in July to early August. Be prepared to spray with insecticides and fungicides; insect and disease pressure is usually worse in the fall than in the spring. The heat-set varieties that have produced well in recent trials are Sun Leaper, Florida 91, Sun Master and Sun Chaser, Phoenix, Redline, Solar Set and Heat Wave II. These varieties have the ability to set some fruit in high temperatures, allowing

the fruit to mature before cool weather. Row covers, which protect the plants from the first frost, have prolonged the harvest period, and they enhance fruit maturity. Also worth trying in fall are Bingo, BHN 216, Spitfire and Mountain Crest, Mountain Fresh or cherry tomatoes.

Since fall tomatoes are such an unsure crop, it's interesting to try several early varieties. Certain varieties may produce better in some parts of the state than others because of the variation in climate and soils. Start early, and get a strong bush.

Lettuce. Head lettuce can be grown in Louisiana in late August. A common mistake is planting the seed too deeply. Lettuce seed require light for germination, so scatter the seed on the row and lightly rake into the soil. Plant leaf lettuce in September. Keep the soil moist until the seeds have germinated and are well established. Head types are tougher to grow. Keep lettuce growing actively to keep it from becoming bitter.

Recommended varieties of lettuce are: head lettuce – Ithaca, Mavrick and Great Lakes 659; leaf lettuce – Slobolt, Grand Rapids, Red Fire, Tango, Red Sails, Salad Bowl, Sunset, Simpson and Elite; romaine lettuce – Parris Island, Ideal, Green Forest, Tall Guzmanne and Green Towers; butterhead or bibb lettuce – Buttercrunch, Ermosa, Esmerelda, Nancy, Oak Leaf; batavia types (leaf lettuce with a unique flavor) – Nevada, Sierra.

Thomas Koske
James Boudreaux

Turfgrasses

Turfgrasses need to make good growth during this time. If they don't make it now, don't push them in the fall when they need to store carbohydrates for the winter. Keep up a good fertility program through August only, then slow down. Water deeply only once or twice a week as needed.

Watch for chinch bugs in St. Augustine and Bermuda grasses. There's still time to dethatch through July if it's needed. Water and fertilize after dethatching.

Centipede should receive its second and last fertilizing in late July or August. It needs the most moisture of all the turfgrasses. On centipede, apply only one-half pound of nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft as a complete turf fertilizer or 17-0-17. Other types of grasses can use about twice this rate. A slow-release turf blend fertilizer is best and worth the extra cost. Carpet grass only needs one fertilizing in spring.

If your last fertilizing is in early September rather than August, add some potash with or shortly after only a light (one-fourth pound) nitrogen application. You will need about 1 pound of potash (K₂O) equivalent per 1,000 sq ft. You can apply this as 1 ½ pounds muriate of potash. Apply all granular materials on a dry lawn, and water in. A winterizer fertilizer should be low in nitrogen and high in potassium, or just use 0-0-60 (muriate of potash). Don't just go by the name "winterizer," because it may be a northern type of fertilizer for fescue blend.

Except for Bermuda or zoysia lawns, post-emergence weed control should not be attempted any more until the grasses are near dormant (winter) or in the midspring growth season. High temperatures can cause excessive herbicide damage on permanent grasses, even if they are listed on the herbicide label as tolerant. On Bermuda and zoysia, try MSMA, DSMA, 2-4, D three-way 'zone' types or Image herbicides now before mid-September. Delay this if very hot and dry.

Thomas J. Koske

Pecans

Nuts on pecan trees rapidly increase in size during June, July and early August. Provide irrigation if rainfall is inadequate. Drought at this time can cause pecans to be smaller than normal.

Considerable nutlet drop often occurs in June and early July. The drop can be caused by lack of pollination. These nutlets have few, if any, blemishes. Hickory shuckworm and pecan nut curculio can also cause nut drop in June and July. A puncture can normally be seen on nuts damaged by insects. A white blotch can frequently be seen around the puncture made by shuckworm. A tobacco type of stain is usually seen around the puncture of a curculio. Malathion and Carbaryl can be used to control shuckworm and curculio.

Spraying for control of scab disease is usually not economical for yard trees since 4 to 6 fungicide applications are often needed to obtain control of scab disease. The scab fungus requires moisture on the leaves for infection to occur. Removing low limbs and providing good air circulation around the tree can reduce scab infection.

Filling of nuts occur in August and September. Inadequate water at this time will decrease quality of pecans. Soak trees weekly if it doesn't rain 1 to 2 inches a week. For deep penetration, let a hose drip under the trees for 8 to 10 hours.

Lichens frequently grow on the trunks and branches of pecans. The growth gives trees an unkempt appearance. Lichens are sometimes mistaken for harmful parasites; however, they are harmless.

Lichens are not single plants, but composite organisms made up of algae and enveloping meshes of fungus filaments. Like Spanish moss, lichens obtain their food chiefly from air and water. They attached themselves not only to trees, but also to such inanimate objects as fence posts and rocks.

The grayish-green paper-like growth that occurs on the bark of pecan trees is a common lichen. This irregular growth varies from less than an inch to several inches across. Its edges are usually lobed and curled upward.

Rapidly growing pecan trees with expanding trunks seldom have much lichen growth.

John Pyzner
Pecan Research-Extension Station

Muscadines – The Grape of the South

The muscadine grape (*Vitis rotundifolia* Michx.) was the first American grape species to be cultivated. This fruit has a long history in commercial and backyard culture. The oldest and most consistent commercial interest in muscadines has been in wine, but juice and fresh fruit market have also been developed. Muscadines so differ from "bunch" grapes genetically, anatomically, physiologically, and in taste that they should be considered a separate fruit.

Muscadines are native to the Deep South and are well-suited for backyard production. They are heat- and drought-tolerant and have very few insect and disease problems. These qualities make them an ideal choice for a homeowner who would like to grow some fruit.

Prepared and distributed by:

Dr. Chris R. Robichaux
County Agent
St. Martin Parish