

Horticulture Hints



Winter 2006-2007

LSU
AgCenter
Research & Extension

Landscape Gardening and Ornamentals

2007 All-America Selection Winners

Flower Award Winner

Celosia: Fresh Look Gold. Correctly named, these plants look as fresh in September as they did when planted in the spring. Fresh Look Gold plants produce bright golden plumes that remain colorful all season, not browning with maturity. Since the plumes remain attractive, there is no reason to deadhead; thus, Fresh Look Gold needs little maintenance in a sunny garden. It is a carefree annual, although caterpillars may create holes in the foliage. The golden plumes can be woven into a garden bed like a living tapestry because the plumes have a soft, layered texture. Fresh Look Gold proved to be heat, humidity and rain tolerant in AAS Trials across North America. Plants will grow to a height of 1 foot and should be spaced 10 to 12 inches apart. This celosia is one of the best annuals for season-long performance.

Bedding Plant Award Winners

Petunia: Opera Supreme Pink Morn. Iridescent pink blooms are the unique feature of this vigorous trailing petunia. A silvery shine causes blooms to shimmer, capturing an admirer's attention from a distance. The 2.5-inch flowers are pink, shading to creamy white in the center, with a yellow throat. These three colors on a bloom are named a "morn" type. Opera Supreme Pink Morn plants have many qualities that every gardener wants to find. Plants are continuously flowering, so gardeners can relax and let the plants do what comes naturally – flower. The hybrid plants are capable of growing 3-feet wide in sunny locations. This spreading quality covers garden soil and can choke weeds beautifully. Plants attain a height of only 4 to 6 inches. Opera Supreme Pink Morn can be relied on for exceptional garden performance without pruning or deadheading. Less work enables gardeners more leisure time in the garden.

Vinca: Pacific Burgundy Halo. Pacifica Burgundy Halo is the first vinca with a burgundy halo surrounding a large white center. This bicolor bloom is a vivid contrast, exceptionally visible in an annual garden. Early flowering with a well-balanced plant form, Pacifica Burgundy Halo is recommended for summer flower gardens because of its exceptional heat and drought tolerance. In a full sun garden location, these vinca plants will reach a foot in height and width when mature. Because of ease of growing and continuous flowering, Pacifica Burgundy Halo is perfectly suitable for any garden or patio planters that receive sun. Because vinca needs less water than other annuals, planting Pacifica Burgundy Halo in containers means fewer trips with the hose to water.

Vegetable Award Winner

Pepper: Holy Molé. Holy Molé is a memorable name, and the plant will provide a memorable harvest of peppers. It is the first hybrid pasilla-type pepper, which is used to make the famous molé sauce. Holy Molé showed improved vigor, earliness and considerably higher yield than the comparisons in side-by-side trials. A reason for the higher yield is the virus resistances bred into this cultivar. Holy Molé is resistant to two common viruses that stunt plants and reduce pepper production. The immature green peppers are 7 to 9 inches long and can be harvested in about 85 days from transplanting. If fruit is left on the plant, they will mature to a dark chocolate color. The pepper flavor is nutty and tangy. Mature plants are 3 feet tall – a perfect size for patio containers. Holy Molé is easily grown in a sunny location and thrives on summer heat.

Dealing With Insect Pests on Houseplants

Indoor outbreaks of insect pests can spread rapidly and cause tremendous damage. No indoor rain washes off insects, the climate is mild year round and no natural predators are inside to help control insect populations once they get started. Insects can spread rapidly because we often group houseplants together in well-lit locations close to windows or glass doors and also because we handle healthy plants after handling infested plants.

Three of the most common insect pests found indoors are mealybugs, scales and spider mites. Close and regular inspection of your plants indoors is the best defense against insect outbreaks. Mealybugs are small, oval, soft-bodied insects usually less than one-eighth inch long, distinctly segmented and usually covered with white powdery or cottony waxy secretions. They are sucking insects that feed on the plant's sap and don't move around much on the plants. They typically occur in groups or clumps. Look for white cottony masses in the growing points of plants, in their crowns, under their leaves and where the leaves join the stem of the plant.

Scales are related to mealybugs and also are sucking insects. They are covered with a dome-shaped waxy coating that is most often white, tan or brown depending on the type of scale. Once they are large enough to notice, they are stationary. Their immobility and waxy covering make them difficult to notice, and once you do see the strange bumps or dots on the plant you would never think that they are insects.

Like mealybugs (and many other sucking insects), scale-infested plants will often have shiny, sticky leaves. Even the floor or table the plant sits on may become sticky. This is the result of the accumulation of honeydew (a

sweet, sticky excretion of the insects) on surfaces under the plant.

Spider mites are very tiny, and the damage they cause is initially very subtle. Early damage causes the foliage to appear dull, faded and unhealthy. As damage increases, new growth may be stunted, and deformed and older leaves may become very faded, show signs of browning and begin to drop off. High populations of mites may produce fine webbing between leaves and where the leaves join the main stem.

When you detect a pest problem, take prompt action. First, isolate the infested plant or plants. All three of these pests are contagious. Always wash your hands after working with an infested plant, especially if you are about to handle healthy plants.

Without the help of natural controls found outside, you are going to have to do the eradication job yourself. If you prefer not using a pesticide, physical control is worth a try but requires effort, patience and persistence.

Spraying the plant every day with a strong stream of water (especially under the leaves) will usually get rid of spider mites. Continue spraying for at least a week. Indoors, spraying will work well only for plants small enough to move to sinks or showers. Otherwise, move plants outside to a shady area for treatment (weather permitting). A strong stream of water can be tried on mealybugs, but you should also scrub at the cottony clusters with a soft toothbrush to dislodge them.

You will commonly see recommendations for controlling mealybugs with rubbing alcohol applied with a cotton swab. This can work, but you must treat the plant regularly and persistent over several weeks.

If you decide to use pesticides, you must choose materials that are labeled for use on plants indoors and are safe to use on the plant you intend to spray. Do not use sprays that are meant to be applied outside or those for controlling indoor house pests such as roaches or ants.

Mealybugs, scales and mites are all controlled by horticultural oil sprays, which kill these pests by suffocation and are relatively low in toxicity. Many insecticidal soap products also have labels for indoor use and are excellent for mites and good on mealybugs but not very effective on adult scale. And, the premixed houseplant insecticides that contain pyrethrum or pyrethrin as their active ingredient are effective on these pests.

Do use pesticides cautiously, and follow label directions precisely. Be prepared to make several applications for complete control. Since spraying can be messy, particularly when spraying larger plants, move plants outside to spray them whenever practical.

Pruning Everblooming Roses

Roses should be pruned anytime from late January (South Louisiana) through mid-February (North Louisiana). This pruning is especially important for the popular hybrid tea and grandiflora roses. Without this annual pruning, these roses generally become leggy, less vigorous and unattractive and do not bloom as well. But all types of roses generally require some pruning each year to control their shape or size.

Use sharp bypass hand pruners on roses. Should you need to cut canes larger than one-half inch in diameter, you should use bypass loppers. It's a good idea to wear a sturdy pair of leather gloves and long sleeves to protect your hands and arms from the thorns.

Here is the basic procedure for pruning back hybrid tea and grandiflora roses. First, remove all diseased or dead canes by cutting them back to their point of origin. Weak, spindly canes the diameter of a pencil or less, should also be removed the same way. A good rose bush should have four to eight strong healthy canes the diameter of your finger or larger after this first step. Cut back the remaining canes to about 24 inches from ground level. When you prune back a cane, make the cut about one-quarter inch above a dormant bud or newly sprouted side shoot. Try to cut back to buds that face outward, away from the center of the bush. The new shoot produced by the bud will grow outward, opening up the bush for light, air and orderly growth. This may seem picky, but this really does make a difference.

Other types of roses that are everblooming (such as China, tea, noisette, Bourbon, polyantha, floribunda, landscape and miniature roses) also may be pruned now. In general, roses in these categories have more pleasing shapes without severe pruning. Unless there is a need to control their size, they are only lightly shaped under most circumstances.

These roses also should have any dead or diseased canes pruned out at this time. To shape the bushes you can use hand pruners to selectively cut back individual branches. These tough roses can even be sheared with hedge shears to shape them and encourage full, bushy growth. If some of your bushes are considerably overgrown, they will tolerate severe pruning to get them back into shape. As a rule of thumb, these roses are cut back about one-quarter to one-half their height, depending on the situation. Long, especially vigorous shoots that have grown well beyond the rest of the bush and make it look out of balance may be cut back harder than the rest of the bush. Young bushes planted within the last year or two will likely not need drastic pruning, but may be cut back slightly to encourage a full, bushy plant.

It is far easier for you and healthier for the rose bush if you prune at least once annually. It is very difficult to properly prune a rose bush that has been allowed to grow for several years without pruning. Don't forget that we also do a second, but not as severe, pruning on everblooming roses in late summer – around late August.

Pruning Once-Blooming Roses



Once-blooming roses should not be pruned in late winter. Once-blooming roses produce their flowers on growth made the previous year. They bloom in one big gush during late spring and early summer and then bear few or no flowers the rest of the year. Once-blooming roses that should not be pruned now include many climbing and rambler roses (such as Cherokee, swamp, Lady Banks, Veilchenblau, Dorothy Perkins and Blaze) and some old garden types. If you are not sure what type of rose you have, think about how they bloom. If once-blooming roses are pruned back hard now they will produce few, if any, flowers.

When extensive pruning of once-blooming roses is necessary, it is best done in mid-summer after they have finished flowering. In addition, climbing and rambler roses should not be pruned back hard each year as we do with many bush roses. Pruning climbers and ramblers is largely determined by how large and on what structure they are being trained. Pruning, when done, is more selective and less extensive.

Growing Amaryllis

Few flowering bulbs can surpass the stately beauty of the amaryllis. Blooming typically in April, this popular bulb is a star performer in the spring garden. Dormant bulbs are available now, and, with proper care, they can become a long-lasting part of your landscape.

Dormant bulbs that you purchase now, however, must be handled specially this winter. When they are dried off and forced into dormancy for shipping purposes, the bulbs are triggered to bloom during the winter rather than the spring. If you plant bulbs you purchase now outside into the garden, they will send up their flower stalks this winter when they are likely to be damaged by cold.

Plant amaryllis bulbs purchased now into pots using a well-drained potting soil with the neck of the bulb above the soil surface. You can also buy them pre-planted. Place the pot in a sunny window (the more sun the better), and keep the soil evenly moist. When the flower stalk begins to emerge, rotate the pot 1/2 turn every few days so it will grow straight. If you provide your amaryllis with too little light, the flower stalk will grow excessively tall and may even fall over. Flowering generally occurs in December or early January from bulbs planted in November. Some large bulbs will produce two flower stalks.

After the flowers have faded, cut the stalk at the point where it emerges from the bulb, but do not cut any foliage. Keep the plant inside and continue to provide plenty of light or the leaves will be weak. Water your amaryllis regularly when the soil begins to feel dry, but it is not really necessary to fertilize them during this time.

In April, it's time to plant your bulbs in the garden. Choose a well-prepared spot that receives sun for 4-6 hours. Amaryllis planted in the garden this spring will get into their natural cycle and bloom in April the following years.

Plant Trees in Winter

December, January and February are excellent months to plant trees. When planting trees, dig the holes at least twice the diameter of the root balls and no deeper than the height of the root balls.

Remove container-grown trees from their containers, and place them gently onto the firm, undisturbed soil in the bottom of the holes. A root ball tightly packed with thick encircling roots indicates a root-bound condition. Try to unwrap or open up the root ball to encourage the roots to spread into the surrounding soil.

Set balled and burlapped trees in the hole with the burlap in place. Once trees are in the holes, remove any nylon twine or wire basket that may have been used and fold down the burlap from the top of the root balls. Remove synthetic burlap completely. Check with nursery staff when you purchase the tree to determine if the burlap is synthetic. The top of the root ball should be level with or slightly above the surrounding soil. It is critical that you do not plant the tree too deeply.

Thoroughly pulverize the soil dug out from the hole. Use this soil, without any additions, to backfill around the tree. Research shows that blending amendments such as peat moss or compost into the soil used to fill the hole slows establishment. It encourages the roots to grow primarily in the planting hole, delaying their spread into the soil beyond and may interfere with drainage. As a tree grows, its roots will grow out well beyond the reach of its branches. Since the roots will spend most of the tree's life growing in native soil outside of the planting hole, they might as well get used to it from the beginning.

Add soil around the tree until the hole is half full, then firm the soil to eliminate air pockets but do not pack it tightly. Finish filling the hole, firm again and then water the tree thoroughly to settle it in. Generally, don't add fertilizer to the planting hole, although it is all right to use some slow-release fertilizer in the upper few inches, if you like. Using a root stimulator solution is optional. Stake the tree properly if it is tall enough to be unstable; otherwise it's not necessary. Leave the support in place no more than 9-12 months.

It is beneficial to keep the area 1 to 2 feet out from the trunk free from weeds and grass. This encourages the tree to grow faster by eliminating competition from grass roots, and it prevents lawn mowers and string trimmers from damaging the bark at the base of the tree.

✓ Checklist for December/January/February

1. Daffodils can be planted through late December. Excellent cultivars are Ice Follies, Fortune, Carlton and Unsurpassable.
2. Remove old flowers from your cool-season bedding plants to extend blooming and improve flower performance.
3. Plant gladiolus in late February in South Louisiana. Prolong the blooming season by planting at 2- to 3-week intervals for a couple of months.
4. Mulch shrub and flower beds to get plants off to a good spring start and minimize weed problems.
5. Watch azaleas in February for lacebugs. They cause the foliage to have numerous small white spots and feed underneath lower foliage. Control with horticultural oil sprays or Orthene.
6. A late winter planting of petunias will provide a good flower show for early spring. Consider the new Wave series.
7. Winter is a great time for planting trees. Some excellent native species for Louisiana include nuttall oak, Southern red oak, willow oak, red maple, Southern magnolia, bald cypress and mayhaw.
8. February is the ideal time to fertilize trees.
9. January and February are good months to prune landscape trees and any deciduous and evergreen plants that don't flower in the spring.
10. Clean and sharpen tools before you put them away. Wipe the metal blades with an oily cloth that coats them with a thin layer of protective oil to help prevent corrosion. Coat wooden handles with protectants such as a sealer, tung oil or varnish.
11. February is a good time to plant container or bare root roses. Bare root rose bushes should be planted by the end of February. Early planting allows rose bushes to become established in their new location before they begin to bloom. This increases the number and quality of flowers, and the bush is more prepared to deal with summer heat when it arrives in May. Plant roses in sunny, well-prepared beds that have excellent drainage.

Vegetables to plant in December . . .

Onions (transplant), shallots (sets or green transplants), lettuce, spinach, endive, escarole and cabbage (seed or transplant). Root crops and greens may be started. Cabbage, broccoli, brussels sprouts and cauliflower seed may be planted in South Louisiana coldframes or protected areas to produce transplants for spring harvest. Start shiitake mushrooms, or at least cut mushroom logs. Order seeds now for 2006 garden crops.

. . . and in January

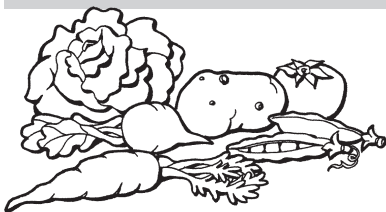
Beets, carrots, radishes, turnips, cabbage, broccoli, mustard, spinach, kale and Irish potatoes. Seed in coldframe, hotbed, greenhouse: broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, Chinese cabbage, head lettuce, tomatoes, bell peppers and eggplants. Transplant onions, shallots and celery. Start shiitake mushroom logs or cut logs while dormant.

Seed in coldframe, hotbed, greenhouse in January: tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, cabbage, broccoli, Chinese cabbage, cauliflower and lettuce.

. . . and in February

Beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, turnips, mustard, spinach, parsley, Chinese cabbage, radishes, Irish potatoes, leaf lettuce, head lettuce, tomatoes, eggplants, snap beans and sweet corn in extreme South Louisiana the last part of the month.

Transplant broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, head lettuce and shallots. Plant seed sweet potatoes on warm (70 F) raised beds.



Crop Highlights

Onions. Transplant pencil-size onion plants from mid-December through January. Fertilize with 4 to 5 pounds of a complete fertilizer such as 8-24-24 or 13-13-13 per 100 feet of row about 2 weeks before transplanting. Space plants about 3 to 4 inches apart in the row. Several drills may be planted on a row with 6- to 12-inch spacing between drills.

Sidedress onions, shallots and garlic when growth starts in or early February. Use 1 pound of ammonium nitrate per 100 feet of row. Two additional sidedressings at 2- to 3-week intervals will increase bulb size.

Onions, shallots, leek and garlic do not compete well with weeds. To control weeds in onions, especially with post-emergence materials like Poast, make all treatments by mid-November to early December. Once the cool, wet weather sets in, it's hard to control weeds. Spray onions, shallots and garlic with malathion to control thrips.

Shallots. Shallot sets can be planted any time in winter. If you have some growing in the garden, replant several as you harvest by separating plants and cutting them back and re-transplanting them. They will continue to divide and make several more plants. By doing this, you can have shallots through spring. Separate plants in December and January for next year's sets if they are crowded.

Tomatoes. December is a good time to look through seed catalogs. Recommended vine varieties are Big Beef, Champion, Terrific, Monte Carlo, First Lady, Hawaiian Hybrid, Better Boy, Jet Star (low acid) and Pink Girl. Recommended bush types are Bingo, Sunleaper, Carnival, Celebrity, Daybreak, Merced, Mountain Spring, Mountain Spring, Spitfire, Summer Flavor 6000, Sunbeam and Sanibel. Other varieties are Crimson Plum, Spectrum 882, Niagra Belle, Mountain Belle, Jolly, Cherry Grande, Sweet Chelseas and Macero II Roma.

Some newer cherries are Jolly Elf, Navidad, Saint Nick and Santa Clause. Nurseries and garden centers are encouraged to handle some of the newer varieties. Try some of the heirloom tomato varieties and BHN 640 or Amelia as spotted-wilt-virus-resistant tomatoes. Order early before they sell out.

Cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower and Chinese cabbage. Cabbage planted now may encounter low temperatures. Temperatures in the low 20s will injure some of the cabbage, and lower temperatures will freeze many varieties. Recommended varieties for winter production are Bravo, Platinum Dynasty, Solid Blue 870, Gourmet, Cheers, Bayou Dynasty, Blue Thunder, Vantage, Fortuna, Quisto, A&C #5+, A&C #5 and Rio Verde. A&C #5 is the hardiest. For reds, try Cardinal, Red Dynasty or Red Rookie.

Bolting in cabbage often occurs in Louisiana. Bolting is caused by exposure of plants to daily temperatures of around 45 F and lower for several weeks. Flower stalks may not show until heads begin to form.

These cole crops will usually produce well in Louisiana in the spring, but time is important, especially with cauliflower and broccoli. They need to be planted early enough to produce before temperatures get too high.

Each of these vegetables can be planted directly in the field in January, but cauliflower and Chinese cabbage should not be transplanted out until February.

Irish potatoes. Begin planting Irish potatoes around mid-January in South Louisiana and around the first of February in North Louisiana. Fertilize at the rate of 7 to 8 pounds of a complete fertilizer (8-8-8, 13-13-13) or 4 to 5 pounds of 8-24-24 per 100 feet of row before planting. Sidedress with 1 pint of ammonium nitrate when plants are 8 inches tall.

Cut seed potatoes into blocky pieces that weigh about 1 1/2 to 2 ounces each or are about the size of an egg. Be sure each seed piece has at least one eye; this is where the plant will originate. Place cut side down. Irish potato plants may be nipped back by a light frost, but damage is usually not serious, and new growth will be produced. Plant seed pieces 10 to 15 inches apart in the row. Seven to 8 pounds of seed potatoes will plant 100 feet of row.

The red skin varieties recommended for Louisiana are Red LaSoda, LaRouge, Fontenot and Norland. Recommended white skin varieties are LaChipper, LaBelle, Norchip, Atlantic, Kennebec and Sebago. Generally, Red LaSoda and Kennebec are the most readily available.

LaBelle is a white, smooth-skin variety released by the LSU AgCenter. It combines a high-yielding ability with excellent chipping and cooking quality. Fontenot, a high-yielding red skin variety, is the most recent released by the LSU AgCenter.

Miscellaneous

Transplant Production

Seed of cole crops such as cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower will germinate satisfactorily in cool soils (temperatures from 45 F to 50 F). They germinate more quickly at higher soil temperatures. After germination, grow plants at 70 F to 80 F for 8-10 weeks for best results. Tomatoes, peppers and eggplant seed germinate best at soil temperatures of 65 F to 75 F. Grow transplants at 65 F to 75 F during the day and 60 F to 65 F at night. Temperatures much lower than this will slow, and possibly stunt, peppers and eggplants.

A common problem is not having enough light to develop a stocky transplant, especially in a window or inside a house. Provide full sunlight all day when seedlings first appear. If light is low, keep plants cooler and drier.

Tom Koske and Jimmy Boudreaux

Fruits and Nuts

Selecting Home Fruit Plantings

Winter is a good time to look through nursery catalogs, gardening magazines and the Internet to look at possibilities of using fruits and nuts in a home planting. Fruits can be planted in a small orchard or can be used in an edible landscape. Selecting different types and varieties of fruit and nuts to put in the home planting can be enjoyable and also very challenging. The pictures and descriptions in catalogs always look and sound so good and there are so many types to choose. You can choose to plant the more typical fruits and nuts such as pecans, plums, pears, blackberries, figs and blueberries, or try the more unusual fruits such as feijoa, jujube, pawpaw and jelly palm.

A small backyard orchard can be planted if you have adequate land. This will enable you to grow a wide variety of fruits and not have to consider the landscape value of the plants. You may also be able to grow enough fruit to give or sell some to neighbors. Most people usually only have a limited amount of space so that they must be very selective in what fruit to plant and how it will look in the landscape.

A number of plants with showy blooms can fit into the landscape. Apples, blackberries, plums, peaches, pears and mayhaw produce showy blooms that are very attractive in the spring; however, they often require spraying to ensure quality fruit. Some fruits have traditionally been used in the landscape with no thought given to fruit production. Feijoa and loquat have very attractive evergreen foliage; however, most plants are seedlings with fruit of mixed quality. Obtaining named varieties with quality fruit will likely require going to mail order or specialty nurseries that specialize in rare fruits. Sometimes plants or propagation wood can be obtained from a neighbor or friend who is growing some of the improved varieties.

Fruit and nut plants also can be used to serve a function in the landscape. Blackberries, feijoa and American hazelnuts planted as hedges can be used to make barriers and screens or to separate areas in the landscape. Large trees like pecans can provide shade.

Consider a number of things when choosing fruits and nuts in the landscape. The climate is a very important factor. Some factors such as freezing weather will obviously eliminate tropical fruits that cannot tolerate frost unless a lot of work and expense is used in protecting plants from cold weather. Many subtropical plants such as citrus, feijoa, loquat and Japanese persimmons can tolerate some freezing weather and do very well in some parts of Louisiana.

Extremely cold winters may occur every 10 to 15 years that can damage or kill subtropical fruits. Loquat is an example of a fruit on which winter temperatures have a major effect. The plant blooms in the fall and winter, and the fruit remains on the plant and ripens in the spring. The plant can survive temperatures near zero F; however, the fruit is usually killed by temperatures from 20 F to 25 F. In North Louisiana this usually results in a fruit crop every 3 to 5 years.

Rainfall and humidity also can be major factors in choosing what to plant. Excessive rainfall and humidity can lead to major disease problems that may require intensive spray programs to produce quality fruit.

Fruit Maintenance Levels

A fruit planting is a long-term project. The most common mistake made by most homeowners is to overextend themselves and plant too many high-maintenance fruit species. Most homeowners are not adequately equipped to spray for insects and diseases. This problem can be minimized by selecting fruit types with few pest problems or by selecting varieties with resistance to known pests. Fruit species may be grouped as high, medium or low maintenance for pest control needs.

- ▶ Low maintenance:
blueberry, citrus, feijoa (pineapple guava), fig, persimmon, loquat, and pear (some varieties).
- ▶ Medium maintenance:
blackberry and muscadine grapes.
- ▶ High maintenance:
apple, peach, nectarine, plum, mayhaw, strawberry and bunch grape.

Selecting fruits primarily from the low-maintenance category will reduce the time and effort required in maintaining a fruit planting.

Neighbors, garden centers, libraries and mail order catalogs can be good sources of information for growing fruit. Unfortunately, it can sometimes be overwhelming with all the different varieties of plants available and sometimes conflicting information being provided. The LSU AgCenter publication 1884, "The Louisiana Home Orchard" is available on line at www.lusagcenter.com. It lists recommended fruit varieties for Louisiana and provides growing information.

Chilling Requirements

Most nontropical fruit species have a rest period associated with a loss of leaves or dormancy during the winter. Plants will remain in this rest period until they receive a specific number of hours of cold below 45 F. This is referred to as a “chilling requirement.”

The chilling requirement of a given variety is generally controlled and constant for that variety. When the rest period is satisfied, the plant becomes active with the warmth of spring. Some varieties may have rest periods of only 200-300 hours. Others may have more than 1,000 hours.

A plant that does not receive sufficient cold to satisfy rest period requirements does not perform well. Such plants are often delayed in both leafing out and blooming and will have scattered bloom over a long period. Blossoms and fruit may drop prematurely. Therefore, it is important to know chilling requirements of individual fruit varieties and to know which ones are adapted to your specific area.

North Louisiana normally has between 700 and 1,100 chill hours. South Louisiana normally has between 400 and 700 chill hours. Coastal Louisiana has between 300 and 500 chill hours.

Drainage, an Important Consideration

Poor drainage kills more newly planted fruit trees than all other combined factors, including insects and diseases. Most Louisiana soils are finely textured, and, as a result, water does not move through and out of these soils rapidly. During excessive rain the soil becomes saturated, oxygen is depleted and, after just a few days, roots are damaged.

Waterlog damage to fruit trees can be avoided by elevating each plant on a mound or “turtle back.” A row of plants can be placed on a ridge. Avoid depression areas around trees planted in clay soils or where water remains for several days after rains. Digging a deeper hole than is required to plant the tree can cause the plant to settle and develop a depression area around the plant that will hold water.

Back fill the planting hole with the same soil type found in the hole. Placing sandy or porous planting materials in a planting hole dug in clay soil will cause it to hold water like a pot.

Winter Fruit Tips

1. Collect scion wood from trees for grafting in January or early February. Store wood in plastic freezer bags in the vegetable crisper area of the refrigerator until ready to use.
2. Plant fruit and pecan trees. Always remove the trees from containers, even if they're paper or cardboard. Provide for drainage by planting fruit trees on a mound or turtleback. Do not use any fertilizer until May or early June on newly planted fruit trees.
3. Make trellis repairs for blackberries and grapes.
4. Add mulch to rabbiteye blueberry plants. Pine straw, hay and well-decomposed grass clippings work best.
5. Plan to handle summer droughts by establishing a trickle irrigation system in your home fruit orchard. Trickle irrigation saves time and money.
6. Complete spring application of fertilizer in fruit orchard.
7. Prune trees that have not been pruned.

John Pyzner

Turfgrass and Lawns

December begins a bleak time for warm-season turfgrasses. Most turfgrasses should be dormant or at least close to this stage. Because the grasses are not actively growing, nitrogen fertilization should cease on homelawns unless overseeded with ryegrass. Nitrogen fertilization on dormant turfgrasses can lead to increased brown patch and winter kill. Also, nitrogen applications during this time have a greater potential for movement into ground water.

Although many homelawns do not require regular mowing or fertilization, now is an excellent time to have your soil tested. To test your soil, bring in 1 pint of soil to your parish LSU AgCenter office. Soil samples should be a composite of soil plugs four inches in depth from various places around the lawn.

For those who have chosen to overseed with ryegrass, apply 2 to 3 pounds of ammonium nitrate or equivalent fertilizer per 1,000 square feet every 4-6 weeks to maintain desired growth and color. Postpone any permanent warm-season turfgrass establishment from seed until next spring. Sod, such as St. Augustine, can be laid during winter if necessary, but remember to keep it moist to prevent drying out and dying. Establishment is best left until well after spring green-up. Areas that are thin or bare can be overseeded with ryegrass to reduce muddy conditions or prevent soil erosion.

Brown patch diseases can come and go throughout the winter if the weather is mild. Treatment with fungicides containing thiophanate, propiconazole, iprodione, PCNB, captan, triadimefon or maneb will reduce brown patch spreading. Damage from brown patch will slow spring green-up and affected areas will remain unsightly until warmer weather conditions allow for turfgrass recovery.

Warm-season turfgrasses may show signs of green-up in southern Louisiana in late February. Do not push turfgrass growth with fertilizer. Fertilizer applied too early will feed the winter weeds, and fertilizer applied too heavily will result in lush growth that is more susceptible to injury from late frosts or brown patch. Let the grass green-up gradually, and do not fertilize until after the first mowing. Remember, irrigate only as needed.

Tom Koske

Holiday Plants



Holiday Cactus

Thanksgiving cactuses and Christmas cactuses have been hybridized with each other to the point that we now group today's cultivars together under the catchall name holiday cactus. They bloom from November through January. They are commonly purchased this time of year for holiday decoration. Place them near a bright, sunny window and keep the soil evenly moist. It is quite common for these plants to drop flower buds when you get them home, but there is little that you can do. These plants resent being moved at all while blooming, much less being packaged, shipped, unwrapped, displayed, purchased and taken home. But, many blooms and buds will hold on, and their great beauty in shades of magenta, red, pink, orange, gold or white make their purchase worth it.

When they finish blooming, these plants should not be discarded. The holiday cactus will reward you with blooms every year for many years if grown correctly. After all the flowers have dropped off, allow the soil to become fairly dry before watering and keep the plant in a bright window. An east or west window will provide plenty of light. This plant is a beautiful and easily grown houseplant. Even out of bloom, the flattened, jointed stems arch over attractively. They also will thrive on a porch or patio in a semi-shaded position during the summer. They are triggered to bloom by long nights and chilly nighttime temperatures in the 50s. The easiest way to get a plant to bloom again is to place it outdoors (if you have been growing it inside) where it will get a little morning sun and shade the rest of the day. Leave it outside, allowing the progressively longer and cooler nights to initiate buds to form (do not leave the plant out on a night when a freeze is predicted, however). Allow the soil to dry before watering. Once you see little flower buds at the tip of the branches, move the plant into a bright window inside and keep the soil evenly moist.

Enjoy Holiday Plants

Among the special pleasures associated with the holiday season, decorative plants such as poinsettias, holiday cactuses and living Christmas trees play an important part in decking the halls for the holidays. How well you care for them is an important part of how long they will stay attractive.

After purchasing a holiday plant, be sure to protect it while bringing it home. Sudden exposure to low temperatures and wind will damage the plant. Poinsettias are particularly fragile, so handle them with care. It's best to have them sleeved before you take them out of the store. When you get them home the plants should be located for attractive display, but a spot where they will receive some natural light will give best results.

Holiday plants are often sold in pots wrapped in decorative coverings. Punch holes in the covering where the drainage holes of the pot are located to allow the soil to drain properly when you water. This prevents the roots from becoming waterlogged. Make sure the furniture or floor you set your plant on is protected by a plastic saucer. Another option is to remove the pot from the decorative covering, take the plant to sink, water it and allow it to drain there; then return it back to the location where you are displaying it and slip it back into the decorative pot cover. The water needs of your plants should be checked everyday by feeling the soil with your finger. Water thoroughly when the soil begins to feel somewhat dry. Never let a holiday plant wilt.

Low light, low humidity, drafts, allowing a plant to dry out and placing plants near sources of heat can all shorten the attractive life of your holiday plant. With a little care and attention, you can make sure that your holiday plant will provide a beautiful display throughout the season.

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Please contact your parish agent for additional information.

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Parish agents, please adapt these suggestions to your area before disseminating.

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