Horticulture Hints

Spring 2014

Louisiana Master Gardener Volunteer Program Offers You Opportunities To Learn, Help Others

Many newcomers and inexperienced gardeners in Louisiana need gardening advice. As a certified Louisiana Master Gardener volunteer, you could educate and advise home gardeners in your community.

Master Gardeners provide important and valuable contributions. Working as volunteers through their parish LSU AgCenter Extension Service offices; Louisiana Master Gardeners develop and enhance community educational programs related to horticulture. Depending on the community needs, organized volunteer activities may involve garden shows, gardening workshops, answering horticulture-related phone calls at the parish Extension Service office, garden tours, developing educational materials and newsletters, demonstration gardens, plant health clinics, presentations to garden clubs and community or school gardening programs.

The Louisiana Master Gardener Program is open to anyone with a willingness to learn and a desire to help others and is tailored for both beginners and experienced gardeners. Training classes are planned, organized and conducted by LSU AgCenter faculty members and offer instruction on a variety of interesting horticultural subjects. Master Gardener participants learn about insects, diseases, weeds, ornamentals, lawn care, fruits, vegetables, soil fertility, plant problem diagnostics and much more.

If you have an interest in improving your gardening skills and knowledge and the desire to work with people, consider becoming a certified Louisiana Master Gardener volunteer with the LSU AgCenter. To learn more about the Louisiana Master Gardener Program, contact your parish LSU AgCenter office or visit www.LSUAgCenter.com/mastergardener

LOUISIANA Master Gardener SM

An educational program of the LSU AgCenter

LouEASYana GARDENING

Spring is here, and so are plant diseases!

Many times phone calls reach our offices from people concerned about plants in their landscapes or vegetable gardens becoming sickly or showing symptoms of some kind. The first feeling I get when receiving these phone calls is a feeling of excitement, as if I am a detective assigned to a case.

First things first, gather and organize the clues. The clues are the in the form of symptoms, signs and environmental conditions in which the victim, I mean plant, is found. The symptoms are defined as any abnormality in "normal" growth of the plant. Signs are evidence of a pathogenic agent on the symptomatic plant; a few examples are mycelium (white fuzzy strings) and spores for fungi and ooze for bacteria. The signs in combination with symptoms and pattern of symptomology on individual plants and/or groups of plants can paint a beautiful story for the detective or plant diagnostician.

Plant pathologists use the disease triangle as their hierarchical concept to determine the disease. Within the disease triangle, there are three parameters that work in a matrix to determine level of disease. Those are susceptible host, pathogen and environment. The level of each parameter will work in harmony to determine the output, which is disease progress and severity.

Andrew Loyd, Orleans Parish County Agent

Vegetable Gardening

Vegetables to Plant in March

Direct plant snap bean, Swiss chard, radish, lettuce, collard, mustard, turnip and sweet corn seeds into the ground. Plant tomato, pepper and eggplant transplants after March 15 in south Louisiana and April 1 in north Louisiana. Cantaloupes, squash, cucumbers and watermelons really need warmer soils to perform their best. Make sure all frost is over before planting these. Technically, you can use the same dates given for other crops (March 15 and April 1), but to be on the safe side, you might wait a week or two extra for these.

... And in April

Plant snap beans, butter beans, radishes, collards, cucumbers, eggplants, cantaloupes, okra, Southern peas (field peas), peanuts, pumpkins, winter squash, summer squash, sweet corn, sweet potatoes (late April), tomatoes (transplants), peppers (transplants) and watermelons. Remember that most pumpkins require 90-120 days to reach full maturity, and some giant pumpkins may even require up to 160 days before they are ready to be harvested. These days must all be frost free. If you are aiming to harvest for Halloween, adjust your planting date according to the variety of pumpkin you are planting.

... And in May

Most spring vegetables can be planted in May, since the soil has warmed and danger of frost has passed. Plant sweet potatoes (transplants), okra, Southern peas, pumpkins, peanuts, sweet corn, watermelons, cucumbers, butter beans, squash, cantaloupes, collards and eggplants (transplants). Snap beans, butter beans, sweet corn, tomatoes and peppers (transplants) should be planted in the early days of May to prevent poor fruit set as a result of high temperatures.

Now Is Time To Think About Spring Vegetable Garden

Wow, have we had some cold temperatures this spring! Did you use your "snow days" to think about the garden, order supplies and dream of the great things we'll soon be growing?

Our average last frost date in south Louisiana is March 15, and it's April 1 for gardeners in north Louisiana. Of course, that doesn't guarantee we won't experience some frost or freezes after those dates. So if you plan on planting right before or a little after these dates, prepare yourself with some frost protection cloth.

One favorite is the lightweight, white cloth that is available at most hardware stores and plant nurseries. You can leave this cloth on for several days without harming plants because light can still penetrate through it. But check underneath for insects and signs of disease.

As always, if you have special varieties in mind, start your tomato, eggplant and pepper crops eight weeks prior to the date you want to set them in the ground. Start your cucurbit crops (cucumbers, cantaloupes, watermelons, squash and pumpkins) only three to four weeks prior to setting them in the ground. Cucurbits also can be direct seeded easily.

Crop Highlights

Sweet corn. Planting corn early may reduce exposure to corn earworm populations. The earliest planting should be made seven days before the average last frost date for your area. Plant every two to three weeks to provide a continuous supply of sweet corn. Remember to plant the same variety in a block of at least three rows side by side at each planting. This will help ensure good pollination and well-filled ears.

When planting sweet corn, drop two or three seeds every 8 to 12 inches in the row and cover to about ½ inch to 1 inch deep. After the seeds germinate and the plants are 3 to 4 inches tall, thin to one plant per hill. Side-dress a 100-foot row with 1½ to 3 pounds of calcium nitrate when the plants are about 12 inches tall and again when the plants are 24-36 inches tall. One pint of fertilizer or 2 cups is about 1 pound. Three ounces of seed will plant 100 feet of row.

Dust or spray silks with Sevin every two to three days after silks first appear and until silks begin to dry. This treatment will help reduce corn earworm damage.

Harvest sweet corn early in the morning while it is still cool. Chill or cook immediately after harvesting. Sweet corn that is ready to harvest should have a well-filled ear. Kernels should be bright and plump, and their juice should be milky.

If you love to eat fresh corn on the cob, try the improved super sweet (Sh2) and enhanced (SE) varieties of sweet corn. They are much sweeter than regular sweet corn and hold their sweetness longer. The super sweets need to be isolated from field corn or regular sweet corn because they lose some of their sweetness when pollinated by these other types of corn. The super sweets don't germinate well in cool soils, so wait until soil has warmed considerably before planting.

Varieties such as Seneca Horizon, Funks G90, Gold Queen, Merit, Silver Queen (white) and Golden Cross Bantam always perform well. But there also are many new high-sugar modern varieties commonly available. We regularly grow Ambrosia, Incredible, Miracle and Delectable at Burden and always enjoy both the production and flavor of these varieties. But there are others available that would be worth trying, such as Temptation, Obsession, Honey and

Cream, Peaches and Cream, Silver Queen, Luscious and any of the XTRA-Tender numbered series.

Snap beans. Plant bush varieties every two weeks, starting right after the average last frost date for your area. This will provide a continuous harvest for an extended period.

Good bush snap beans for Louisiana are Ambra, Bronco, Contender, Valentino, Dusky, Festina, Hialeah, Magnum, Storm, Strike, Provider and Bush Blue Lake 274. An All-America Selections winner is Derby. Try Roma II for a good-eating, flat Italian pod bean. For a purple pod bush snap, try Royal Burgundy in early spring. Those who prefer yellow wax beans should choose Golden Rod Wax and Goldmine.

One-half pound of snap bean seeds will plant a 100-foot row. Plant seeds 1-2 inches apart in the row. High temperatures at bloom may cause many of the flowers to fall off. Generally, snap beans don't produce well when planted in late May. For best quality, harvest pods before the developing seeds cause the pod to bulge. Beans can be held for up to seven days at 40-45 degrees Fahrenheit and 90-95 percent humidity.

Pole snap bean varieties produce larger yields since they produce for a longer period than bush varieties. Space seeds about 6-12 inches apart. About 2-3 ounces of seeds will plant a 100-foot row.

For pole snaps, the All-America Selections winner is Kentucky Blue. Rattle Snake and McCaslan have done well in Louisiana. For those who want a bean that sets well in the heat, try the vigorous Yardlong Asparagus Bean and harvest pods when about 18 inches high.

Tomatoes. Plant tomatoes in a well-drained site that receives six to eight hours of direct sunlight each day. When tomatoes don't get enough sunlight, few blossoms form and many of those that form fall off before setting fruit. Begin transplanting in mid-March in south Louisiana and at or after April 1 in north Louisiana – after the danger of frost is over. If a frost occurs, you will need to cover the newly planted plants! To avoid severe damage from diseases and insects, spray tomatoes after fruit set every seven to 10 days with a fungicide (Daconil or Maneb). Scout weekly for insects.

Space tomato plants 18-24 inches apart. Fertilize with 5-6 pounds of 13-13-13 per 100-foot row prior to planting and side-dress at first and second bloom with calcium nitrate or potassium nitrate.

Tomato vines may be determinate or indeterminate. Indeterminate types have a vegetative terminal bud that continues to grow. Determinate types have a fruiting terminal bud that keeps the plant from growing beyond a predetermined height. Determinate types are better suited for container gardening. Indeterminate types will need to be staked in the garden.

Indeterminate varieties that grow well in Louisiana include Better Boy and Big Beef (large); Champion and Pink Girl (pink); and Sweet Million, Sweet Chelsea, Jolly, Small Fry, Juliet, Elfin, Cupid, Mountain Belle and Sun Gold (cherry).

Determinants have very productive vines that grow to heights of 4 feet. Determinants should be pruned only once or twice up to the first cluster.

Recommended determinate types for Louisiana include Celebrity (an All-America Selections winner, best taste); Carolina Gold, Florida 91, Mountain Spring, Cherry Grande (cherry) and Floralina. Also try Sun Master, Sunleaper, Mountain Spring and Phoenix.

Note: The tomato spotted wilt virus has nearly eliminated tomato production in some areas. If you had trouble with it, plant Bella Rosa, Mountain Glory, Amelia, Crista, Quincy, Tribeca, Tribute and Talladega varieties.

Bell pepper, eggplants and okra. Wait to transplant okra, bell peppers and eggplants until the weather has warmed considerably. These vegetables are sensitive to cold soils and weather. Once stunted by cool weather, they recover slowly.

A garden site with full sun is required for growing bell peppers. Any shade will greatly reduce fruit set. Space peppers about 18 inches and eggplants 18-36 inches apart.

Recommended nonhybrid varieties of bell peppers for Louisiana are Capistrano, Jupiter and Purple Beauty.

Recommended hybrid bell peppers are Revolution, Heritage and the large King Arthur, Valencia, Paladin and Plato, Camelot (X3R), Aristotle, Gypsy, Tequila (purple) and Mavras (black).

(Note: Tomato spotted wilt virus has hindered bell pepper production in many areas.) The varieties Stiletto, Patriot and Excursion II are resistant to tomato spotted wilt virus. Try these varieties if you have had trouble producing bell peppers.

Recommended hybrid eggplant varieties are Fairy Tale, Calliope, Classic, Epic, Dusky, Santana, Hansel or oriental Ichiban. The green eggplant varieties produce well in Louisiana and are less bitter than the purple varieties in hot, dry weather. The Louisiana Market Bulletin is a fairly good source for green eggplant seed and other hard-to-find vegetable seeds and plants. Kermit is a green variety of eggplant that might be worth a shot.

Cucurbits. All squash, cucumber and melon members of the cucurbit family can be planted in May, but yields may be lower than normal with the late plantings. Plant cucurbits outdoors well after the danger of frost is over. Do not keep transplants in pots longer than three to four weeks prior to planting in your garden.

Recommended cucumber varieties for slicing are Dasher II, General Lee, Thunder, Speedway, Poinsett 76, Slice More and Intimidator.

For pickling, try Calypso, Fancipak, Jackson and Sassy.

Recommended summer squash crooknecks are Prelude II, Dixie, Gentry, Goldie, Supersett, Destiny III and Medallion.

Recommended yellow straight-neck squash varieties are Goldbar, Liberator III, Enterprise, Cougar, Multipik, Patriot II, Superpik and Fortune.

Recommended zucchini varieties are Justice III, Independence II, Tigress, Lynx, Spineless Beauty, Senator, Gold Rush (AAS) and Payroll.

Recommended scallop or patty pan squash varieties are Peter Pan and Sunburst.

Recommended hard shell (winter) squash varieties are Waltham Butternut, Butternut Supreme, Early Butternut, Tay Belle Table Queen, Honey Bear, Cream of Crop, Table King and Imperial Delight.

Viruses are a big problem in squash production. Try planting some of the new virus-resistant varieties: Prelude II and Destiny (yellow crookneck); Liberator and Conqueror (yellow straight neck); and Declaration, Payroll, Judgment III, Revenue and Independence (zucchini).

Recommended cantaloupe varieties are Ace, Aphrodite, Athena, Primo, Magnum 45, Super 45, Ambrosia, Earlidew (honeydew type) or Honey Max (honeydew type).

Recommended watermelon varieties are Crimson Sweet (OP), Jubilee II (OP), Fiesta, La Sweet (OP), Jamboree, Jubilation, Patriot, Regency, Royal Star, Royal Jubilee, Royal Sweet, Sangria, Stars 'n Stripes and Starbrite. Seedless varieties include Revolution, Summer Sweet 5244, TriX Carousel 212 or 313, Cooperstown and Millionaire. Ice box type: Sugar Baby. Yellow: Summer Gold and Tender Gold.

Apply 2-3 pounds of 8-24-24 or similar fertilizer per 100-foot row before planting. Side-dress with 1½-2 pounds of a complete fertilizer (13-13-13) per 100 feet of row when vines begin to run. Remove all but three to four well-shaped fruit from each plant when they reach 4-5 inches in diameter.

Pumpkins are much like winter squash, but the flesh often is coarser and stronger. Good varieties to try include Atlantic Giant, Prize Winner, Aladdin, Big Autumn, Merlin, Autumn Gold, Magic Lantern, Orange Smoothie, Munchkin and Baby Boo. See the article on the LSU AgCenter's website: http://www.LSU AgCenter.com/en/crops_livestock/crops/vegetables/2010-Pumpkin-Variety-Evaluation.htm for more information from our 2010 pumpkin evaluations.

Cucurbit hints: Don't be concerned if the first several squash fruit fall off the plant before they reach an edible stage. The first flowers to form in early spring squash are the female flowers (with the miniature fruit). Male flowers do not form at that time, so no pollination takes place. In a few days, though, the male flowers appear and normal fruit set begins. In summer, the process reverses – with the male flowers usually developing first and the females later.

Cucumber yields may be doubled by growing plants on a trellis. To get cucumber vines to climb a trellis or fence, you may need to tie them to the trellis in the beginning. Once they catch hold, they will continue to climb.

Use pesticides on cucurbits late in the afternoon so as not to reduce the bee population. Side-dress cucumbers, squash, watermelons and cantaloupes with 1½ pounds of calcium nitrate per 100-foot row as vines begin to run. Weekly applications of a general-purpose fungicide (Daconil or Maneb) starting at first bloom will protect the foliage and improve yield. Plastic mulch will reduce fruit rot and enhance the production of cantaloupes and the other cucurbits.

Lima beans (butter beans). Lima beans require warmer soil (70 degrees Fahrenheit, at least) than snap beans to germinate, so wait until soil warms (usually in early to mid-April) before planting. Bush varieties to plant are Henderson's Bush, Fordhook 242, Thorogreen, Bridgeton, Nemagreen, Dixie Butterpea or Baby Fordhook.

Plant lima beans every two weeks through mid-May to extend the harvest. One-half pound of seeds will plant a 100-foot row when three or four seeds are planted every 12 inches within the row.

Recommended pole lima beans are King of the Garden, Carolina Sieva, Willow Leaf, Christmas and Florida Speckled. Plant seeds 6-12 inches apart. One-quarter pound of seed will plant a 100-foot row.

Sweet potatoes. Bed seed potatoes during April and into May. Transplants should be ready to cut in four to five weeks. Sweet potato slips (transplants) can be set out in late April if soil is warm enough (greater than 70 degrees Fahrenheit). Cut plants from plant bed about 1 inch above soil line and transplant. Purchase weevil-free plants.

Cutting rather than pulling helps reduce sweet potato weevils and many disease problems. Cuttings develop feeder roots within a day or two if the soil is warm and moist. Holding the cut slips in the shade for two to three days before transplanting will help increase survival. Use a low-nitrogen fertilizer such as 6-24-24 or 8-24-24 at 2-3 pounds per 100-foot row.

Beauregard, developed by the LSU AgCenter, is the most popular variety. It is high yielding, very attractive and tastes great. Bienville, another LSU AgCenter variety, requires a sandy soil.

Okra. Soil needs to be warm (65-75 degrees Fahrenheit) for okra seeds to germinate. Soak seeds overnight in tap water to soften seed coat before planting.

Recommended varieties are Emerald, Annie Oakley (hybrid), Cowhorn, Cajun Delight-AAS, Red Burgundy and Clemson Spineless.

Peanuts. Many home gardeners wish to plant a row or two of peanuts. Shell the peanuts, and plant about four seeds per foot of row. Plant peanuts in April and May.

Spanish peanuts have the smallest seeds. Runner types have intermediate size seeds, and Virginia types have the largest. Fertilize lightly with 1-2 pounds of 8-24-24 or similar fertilizer per 100-foot row. Soil should be high in calcium.

Onions, shallots and garlic. Harvest mature onion, garlic and shallot bulbs during the early summer. When mature, the tops begin to turn yellow or brown and fall over. Pull them, trim tops and roots and lay the plants on top of the row or place in burlap sacks for a couple of days to let them dry, if weather permits. Then store them in a cool, shaded and well-ventilated place. (Ideal storage for onions after drying is at temperatures of 45-50 F in a place with 65-70 percent relative humidity.)

Irish potatoes. Begin digging 90-110 days after planting. Plant tops start turning yellow as tubers reach maturity. Allowing the potatoes to remain in the ground a few days after tops die or after tops are cut will help set or toughen the skin and reduce skinning, bruising and storage rot.

Spraying potatoes with a general-purpose fungicide (Daconil or Maneb) at the end of April or early May will protect the foliage from early blight and improve yields.

To keep potatoes for several weeks, allow cuts and skinned places to heal over at high temperatures. Then store in a cool, dark place with high humidity. Don't store where they will receive light because they will turn green and develop an undesirable taste.

Kathryn Fontenot, Ph.D, Community/School Vegetable Gardens

Fruits

What Is a Goji Berry?

The goji berry (Lycium barbarum) also is called the wolf berry. It is a bright orange/red berry that comes from a shrub that is native to China.

In Asia, goji berries have been eaten for generations in the hopes of living longer. Research shows eating berries like blueberries, cranberries, strawberries and cherries offer definite health benefits because they are filled with powerful antioxidants and other compounds. In laboratory tests, antioxidants minimize damage from free radicals that injure cells and damage DNA. When a cell's DNA changes, the cell grows abnormally. Antioxidants can take away the destructive power of free radicals. Research is ongoing to see if this effect carries over into prevention of disease and aging.

When we measure the antioxidant content of fruits, the very highest concentrations are found in acai, goji, and pomegranate.

Although they sound exotic and most often are found with a high price tag in health food stores, goji berries actually are easy-to-grow, hardy plants. Goji is a sprawling shrub with long, flexible canes and clusters of small, grayish green leaves. The flowers are a brilliant royal purple and they appear in late spring/early summer along the length of the canes. They give way to juicy, bright red fruits that resemble small peppers. They grow sweeter as they mature on the plant. Goji plants continue to flower and produce fruit through the first heavy frost.

Culture and Management

The plants will grow to a height of 5 to 7 feet. They can be planted 3 feet apart in rows. Goji naturally wants to sprawl and creep along the ground. To save space and to make harvesting the berries easier, you can bundle the strongest three to five canes around a 6 to 8 foot stake.

Full sun is best, but they will tolerate a bit of shade. They prefer a soil pH of 6.8 to 8.1. Do not use peat moss or potting mix. Normal garden soil that is well drained is best. They also are very sensitive to fertilizers and do well with light or no applications. The plants tolerate some drought once established, but for best fruit set and quality, water regularly.

Goji does not require pruning to grow well and produce fruit, but you may find the plant is more manageable and easier to harvest when its lateral (horizontal) branches are lightly pruned to encourage branching and the production of vigorous new growth. If using containers, a 5-gallon container should be the minimum size for producing decent sized plants.

Sources and Varieties

Goji plants are self-fruitful and do not require another plant to bear fruit.

The goji can be grown from seeds. Nearly all the seeds from dried fruit in health food stores will germinate, even after years of storage. If the fruit looks and tastes good, the seed may produce productive plants, but you unfortunately won't know until at least three years after planting the seeds.

Seeds should be planted in high pH soil in a greenhouse, spending their first two years there. Planted outside a greenhouse the third spring, they may produce fruit the fourth year.

It is best to buy bare-root or potted plants from a source that can specify species and variety, with some data on regional adaptation and nutrient content. 'Sweet Lifeberry' and 'Big Lifeberry' goji varieties recently have been released into the nursery trade.

Harvesting

Goji berry plants will not be bothered by insects or diseases, but birds, deer and raccoons all may find the fruit as appealing as you do.

Goji berries begin to ripen in early summer. They should be plucked off by hand when they are brilliant red and taste sweet. They come off the plant easily, without the need for pruners or a knife.

Goji berries turn red very quickly but will taste slightly bitter until they are fully ripe. Taste is your best indicator, but, in general, the berries should spend several weeks on the plant before being harvested. It is best to harvest before the first frost, however, because cold can diminish the flavor of the fruit.

You can use the goji berries you grow the same ways you use those you purchase in the store. They can be used fresh, if you wish, or they can be frozen or dried.

To dry goji berries, harvest them and simply spread the fresh berries in a single layer on a sheet of newspaper. Keep in a cool, dry spot, out of bright light, until the berries are dry. They keep their color well and can be used as is or rehydrated with liquid, as your recipe and preferences dictate.

To freeze, place in a freezer bag and lay flat until frozen. This keeps them from sticking together in large clumps. Well-sealed frozen goji berries should keep for several months and can be used straight from the freezer in your recipes.

David Himelrick, Ph.D.

Turfgrasses and Lawns

Lawn Weed Control

Herbicides can be effective tools for reducing weeds in your yard, but the best way to manage weeds is to grow a thick, healthy lawn.

Lawns that are managed properly are lush and healthy, with few weed problems. Visit www.lsuagcenter.com and type in keywords "lawn bmp" for more information on growing a beautiful lawn.

Pre-emergence herbicides – Weed preventer or pre-emergence herbicides can be helpful in preventing the emergence of several annual grasses and broadleaf weeds. Pre-emergence herbicides may be applied safely in late winter to early spring to all established southern lawns.

Most pre-emergence products for home gardeners are granular and should be applied with drop or broadcast spreaders and "watered in" soon after application.

Pre-emergence herbicides kill weeds as they germinate, so timing is everything with these types of chemicals. There is limited opportunity for application, since you have to apply before weeds germinate.

Residents in the New Orleans area and southernmost areas of the state should apply pre-emergence herbicides in late January or early February (definitely before Valentine's Day) and a follow-up application in mid-April. Alexandria to Baton Rouge residents should apply just after Feb. 14, with a follow-up application in late April. If you live in north Louisiana, try to get these herbicides applied in late February to early March, with a follow-up application in mid-May.

Some pre-emergence herbicide trade names to look for are Green Light Crabgrass Preventer, Scotts Halts and Hi-Yield Crabgrass Preventer with Dimension. These pre-emergence herbicides may be reapplied throughout the growing season. Consult product labels.

Post-emergence Herbicides – Post-emergence herbicides are used to kill weeds that already have emerged in the lawn. Winter broadleaf weeds usually are prevalent in the late winter to early spring throughout the state.

These broadleaf weeds often can be controlled by using selective liquid post-emergence "trimec-type" herbicides that contain formulations with three weed killing ingredients – 2,4-D; dicamba and mecoprop.

Broadleaf weed killers are widely available and can be used on most southern grasses. Injury can occur, however, when using them on St. Augustine grass and centipede grass as the weather gets warmer in late spring.

Some examples of trimec-type broadleaf herbicides are Bayer Advanced Southern Broadleaf Herbicide, Ortho Weed B Gon Max for Southern Lawns and Ferti-lome Weed Free Zone. Some product manufacturers recommend a follow-up spray two or three weeks after the first application.

Atrazine is very effective on winter broadleaves and also controls annual bluegrass. This herbicide is consistently the most effective herbicide on winter broadleaf weeds in the LSU AgCenter's lawn weed management trials. Atrazine does not control wild onion, false garlic or blue eyed grass (actually an iris). The herbicide may be safely applied on St. Augustine grass, centipede grass and zoysia, as well as dormant Bermuda grass during the spring. Most garden centers have a good supply of atrazine on their shelves.

Clean your sprayers thoroughly with an ammonia solution if the same sprayer is used for applying insecticides or fungicides on good plants. It is best to buy a sprayer specifically dedicated for weed killers, however, to avoid accidental injury to desirable plants. As always, be sure to read and follow product label recommendations before using any pesticide.

What about weed and feed products? Weed and feed herbicides can be used at the times recommended for the first fertilizer application of the year. Apply weed and feed in the New Orleans area about late March. For north Louisiana, mid-April is the time. Just beware that applying weed and feed too early (late February to early March) may encourage outbreaks of brown patch disease.

Ron Strahan, Weed Scientist/Turfgrass Specialist

Landscape Gardening and Ornamentals

Louisiana Super Plants for Spring 2014

The Louisiana Super Plants program is an educational and marketing campaign of the LSU AgCenter that highlights tough and beautiful plants that perform well in Louisiana landscapes, and there are new selections for the program for spring 2014.

Louisiana Super Plants have gone through several years of university evaluations or have an established history of performing well throughout Louisiana. Louisiana Super Plants have a proven track record: They are "university tested and industry approved." Homeowners and professionals alike can benefit from using Louisiana Super Plants to ensure successful landscaping efforts.

These latest plants and some earlier ones should be available at various points this spring at participating nurseries across the state. See information below about the promotion dates for each of this spring's selections. To find a list of participating nurseries in your area, go to the Louisiana Super Plants website at www.lsuagcenter.com/superplants.

The Louisiana Super Plants for spring 2014 are:

Kauai Series Torenia (promotion beginning in early April)

- Warm-season annual
- Shade to part shade
- Grows 10-12 inches tall and 14-16 inches wide
- Space 12 inches apart
- Plant in spring after danger of frost through midsummer
- Flowers spring through fall
- Many flower colors available
- Low maintenance, no deadheading
- Great for adding color to shady gardens

Buddleia 'Flutterby Petite Tutti Fruitti Pink'
(promotion in mid- to late April)

- Hardy, shrubby perennial
- Full to part sun
- Grows 30-36 inches tall and 30 inches wide
- Space 2-3 feet apart
- Plant spring for midspring through fall bloom
- Unique dark pink flower color and compact plant form
- Drought tolerant
- Very attractive to butterflies

Luna Series Hibiscus (promotion in early May)

- Hardy perennial
- Full sun
- Grows 3 feet tall and 2-3 feet wide
- Space 2-3 feet apart
- Plant in spring after danger of frost through midsummer
- Large 7-8 inch eye-catching blooms spring to fall
- Bright distinctive flowers in four colors
- Grows in average to wet soil
- Attracts butterflies
- Use in containers or plant in landscape

Ferns Thrive in the Shade

Many hardy ferns will thrive in the shady areas of your landscape. The different species range in size from less than a foot to as tall as 3 feet.

One of the great things about ferns is that they are so easy to grow. Not prone to any major insect or disease problems, ferns are one of those plants you can just about plant and ignore.

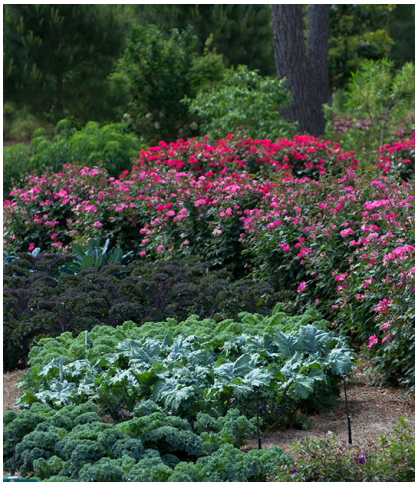
The ferns contrast beautifully with coarser textured shade-loving plants such as philodendron, aspidistra, fatsia, ginger, mahonia and aucuba. Ferns also combine attractively with shade-loving bedding plants, like caladiums, impatiens, begonias and torenias.

Plant ferns in areas that receive one to four hours of direct sun or dappled light during the day. Morning sun is greatly preferred. Avoid hot, dry areas that receive several hours of direct sun in the afternoon or areas that receive sun all day. If you want a fernlike plant for sunnier areas, you could plant yarrow (Achillea millefolium) or asparagus fern (Asparagus densiflorus 'Sprengeri', which is not a true fern).

Ferns require adequate moisture and may need irrigation during hot, dry summer weather. Incorporate generous amounts of organic matter during bed preparation and keep the ferns well mulched. A 2-inch layer of mulch will help reduce the amount of watering required.

Some excellent ferns for use in the landscape include maidenhair fern (Adiantum capillus-vernis), holly fern (Cyrtominum falcatum), leatherleaf fern (Rumohra adiantiformis), sword fern (Nephrolepis cordifolia), Christmas fern (Polystichum acrostichoides), royal fern (Osmunda regalis), autumn fern (Dryopteris erythrosora, known for its coppery red new fronds), lady fern (Athyrium filixfemina), wood fern (Thelypteris kunthii), lace fern (Microlepia strigosa) and sensitive fern (Onoclea sensibilis).

Plan Flower Beds With Maintenance in Mind



Plan the number and size of flowerbeds so the maintenance they will require can be carried out – not just in spring, but through the hot summer months.

By all means, plant to your heart's content. But do not plant more beds than you have the time, physical ability or inclination to devote to their care and upkeep.

Think about the colors you want to use and their placement in the landscape before you go to the nursery. Use masses of colors to maximize visual effects. Use colors that combine well with the background and that pleasantly harmonize or contrast with each other. Locate color in the landscape where you want to focus the viewer's attention.

Evaluate the light conditions and determine if the bed is sunny (six hours or more of direct sun) or shady (two to four hours of direct sun) before you go to the nursery. Choose plants that will do well in the location where you intend to plant them.

Check the labels on the plants you consider using for how tall they will grow, since this is important to how you will use them. It's not at all unusual for bedding plants to exceed the size on the tag in our area due to our long growing season and fertile soils. But it's a good guide.

Enrich flowerbeds with 2 to 4 inches of organic matter (such as compost) and general-purpose fertilizer (following package directions) thoroughly incorporated into the upper 8 inches of soil. The performance of bedding plants in your landscape depends a lot on how well you prepare the beds prior to planting. After planting transplants into the bed, apply about 2 inches of your favorite mulch.

Plant Summer Bedding Plants During Spring

As soon as the danger of frost has passed in your area, you can begin to plant warm-season bedding plants. In south Louisiana this generally begins in late March or early April and around April or early May in north Louisiana.

A group of plants we use as summer bedding plants actually are tender perennials, not true annuals. These plants have more stamina than true annuals and that is important, given our very long summer growing season that stretches from April/May to October. These plants have the ability to look good in October from a spring or early summer planting and are highly recommended for Louisiana gardens. On occasion, these plants may survive a mild winter and provide a second summer of color. (Plants marked with an * in the lists below are tender perennials.)

Warm-season bedding plants for sun to part sun: abelmoschus, ageratum, alternanthera*, amaranthus, balsam, blue daze*, celosia, cleome, coleus (sun-tolerant types), coreopsis, cosmos, Dahlberg daisy, dusty miller*, gaillardia, gomphrena, iresine*, lantana*, lisianthus, marigold, melampodium, narrow-leaf zinnia, ornamental pepper*, periwinkle*, pentas*, portulaca, purslane*, rudbeckia, ruellia*, salvia*, scaevola*, sunflower, tithonia, torenia, perennial verbena and zinnia.

Warm-season bedding plants for part-shade to shade: balsam, begonia*, browallia, caladium (perennial tuber), cleome, coleus*, impatiens*, pentas*, salvia* and torenia.

Louisiana Irises Brighten Landscapes

Blooming from late March to early May, Louisiana irises brighten our landscapes in a rainbow of colors.

The best time to plant Louisiana irises is in August and September, when they are dormant. But you also can buy and plant them with good success in the spring while they are in bloom. When purchased and planted in spring, however, Louisiana irises need to be handled carefully to avoid damaging the foliage and flower buds, and you may need to stake the plants after planting to hold them upright. (Established Louisiana irises do not need staking.)

You can plant Louisiana irises in beds by themselves, combined with other perennials or even in aquatic gardens. Just be sure to choose a sunny location. At least about six hours of direct sun are needed for good blooming.

When planting in a bed, incorporate a generous 3-inch layer of compost, rotted manure or peat moss and some all-purpose fertilizer into the soil. These irises grow best in a soil high in fertility and organic matter.

Aquatic culture is one of the easiest and most natural ways to grow Louisiana irises, and the foliage tends to stay more attractive in the summer. Simply place a potted iris into your decorative pond or aquatic garden so that the rim of the pot is a few inches below the water's surface. Louisiana irises also grow well and look great planted in the ground around the edges of in-ground ponds.

The large seedpods that form after flowering should be removed as soon as you notice them to keep the plants more attractive and vigorous. Fertilize the irises as they begin their winter growing season next fall in October or November.

Plants With Golden Leaves

It's the time of year when gardeners and others have the opportunity to notice and appreciate the exquisite golden-green that is characteristic of the first of spring growth produced by many trees and shrubs.

Although it quickly fades as the new growth matures, feelings about it were beautifully expressed in Robert Frost's poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay":

Nature's first green is gold,

Her hardest hue to hold.

Her early leaf's a flower;

But only so an hour.

Then leaf subsides to leaf.

So Eden sank to grief,

So dawn goes down to day.

Nothing gold can stay.

These days, however, the brilliant golden-green of new spring foliage can stay. Through the selection of cultivars with foliage that stays a brilliant yellowish-green all summer, horticulturists have developed plants that extend that spring feeling through the growing season. The foliage of these uniquely colored plants can provide a bright note in the landscape, and they furnish a wonderful contrast to the medium to dark green foliage of most plants.

Some choices you may find at your local nurseries include trees and shrubs such as golden euonymus (Euonymus japonicus 'Aureo Marginata'), gold catalpa (Catalpa bignonioides 'Aurea'), gold Deodar cedar (Cedrus deodara 'Aurea'), golden barberry (Berberis thunbergii 'Aurea'), Lemon Lime nandina (Nandina domestica 'Lemon Lime') and the new Sunshine ligustrum (Ligustrum sinensis 'Sunshine'); vines such as Buttercup English ivy (Hedera helix 'Buttercup') and 'Margarita' and other chartreuse cultivars of ornamental sweet potato (Ipomoea batatas); perennials such as golden jewels of Opar (Talinum paniculatum 'Limon'), numerous hostas, such as 'Wogon', 'Sum and Substance', 'Guacamole' and 'Golden Prayers', golden sedum (Sedum acre 'Aureum') and Ogon acorus (Acorus gramineus 'Ogon').

Golden Euonymus

Checklist for March, April and May

1. Plant warm-season bedding plants beginning in mid-March (south Louisiana) or mid-April (north Louisiana) and continuing through early May. For best results, plant petunias by mid-March and wait to plant periwinkles (vinca) until late April.
2. After spring bulbs that reliably return and bloom each year have finished flowering, wait until the foliage begins to turn yellow before cutting it off. Food is being manufactured and stored for next year's blooms.
3. Mulch plants to reduce watering requirements, suppress weed growth and minimize soil temperature changes. Excellent mulches are pine straw, chopped leaves and pine bark. Mulch should be applied 2 inches thick for effective weed suppression.
4. Divide and transplant older, larger clumps of chrysanthemums in early March. Failure to divide plants can result in weak, spindly growth with few flowers.
5. Coleuses are great annual bedding plants for Louisiana's landscapes. Try some of the newer sun-loving varieties.
6. Fertilize shrubs in March or April using a general-purpose fertilizer. Carefully follow the label directions.
7. Watch for insect problems this spring. Lace bugs on azaleas and aphids or whiteflies on gardenias are common. Also examine camellias, sasanquas and hollies for scale insects on the lower foliage. Control with acephate, imidacloprid or horticultural oils sprays.
8. To encourage more rapid re-blooming, pinch off old flowers on bedding plants after their first flower cycle is completed this spring.
9. Roses may develop insect problems. Watch for aphids on tender new growth, thrips on flowers and cucumber beetles on foliage. Beetles are especially a problem if a vegetable garden is nearby.
10. Nurseries and garden centers will have crape myrtles for sale in May and June. Plant these shrubs and trees (depending on the variety you select) for great flowering all summer.

2014 Garden Shows and Plant Sales

March 8, 2014
Spring Garden Day, Hammond Research Station, Hammond, La.
Contact Sandra Benjamin at sbenjamin@agcenter.lsu.edu

March 14-15, 2014
Northshore Garden Show, St. Tammany Parish Fairgrounds, Covington, La. — Contact Will Afton at wafton@agcenter.lsu.edu

March 15-16, 2014
Frisco Fest Craft and Spring Garden Show, San Francisco Plantation, Garyville, La. — www.sanfranciscoplantation.org/friscofest.asp

March 21-22, 2014
Southwest Louisiana Garden Conference and Expo, Lake Charles, La. — Contact Robert Turley at rturley@agcenter.lsu.edu

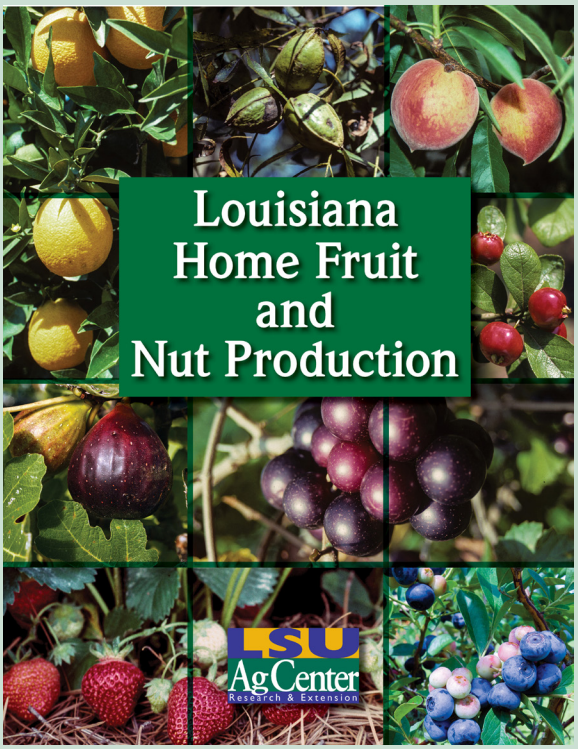
March 29-30, 2014
Baton Rouge Spring Garden Show, LSU AgCenter's Parker Coliseum at LSU, Baton Rouge, La. — Contact David Himelrick at dhimelrick@agcenter.lsu.edu

April 5-6, 2014
Spring Garden Show, City Park Botanical Garden, New Orleans, La. — Contact Andrew Loyd at aloyd@agcenter.lsu.edu

April 12, 2014
Northwest Louisiana Master Gardeners Spring Plant Sale
Randle T. Moore Center, Shreveport, La. — Contact Paula Linn at paulalinn@gmail.com

April 12, 2014
East Baton Rouge Master Gardeners' Spring Plant Sale, LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens at Burden, Baton Rouge, La. — www.mgplantsale.com

June 21, 2014
Garden Festival, Burden Center, Baton Rouge, La. — Contact Jeff Kuehny at jkuehny@agcenter.lsu.edu



New LSU AgCenter Publication Available

Louisiana Home Fruit and Nut Production is an excellent resource for anyone interested in growing fruit or nuts in the area. Filled with 84 full-color pages of useful information, this sprial bound, 8 1/2-by-11-inch handbook includes detailed information about everything from fruits and nuts commonly grown here to crops that aren't really suited for our climate. It also contains information about fruit plants that can double as attractive parts of your landscape. In addition, it features information on choosing the right crop for your situation, selecting a site, preparing your soil, fertilizing, irrigating, controlling pests and more.

$20 plus tax and shipping.

Order online at store.lsuagcenter.com or call 225/578-2263

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Horticulture Hints

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

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