

Horticulture Hints



Spring
2011

Landscape Gardening and Ornamentals

All-America Selections winners for 2011

All-America Selections is a nonprofit organization that tests newly developed cultivars of bedding plants and vegetables in garden plots all across the United States. The 2011 All-America Selections Winners were judged in side-by-side comparison tests with standard cultivars and were selected based entirely on the performance of the winning plants.

Seeds of these plants should be available from most of the larger seed companies. Availability of transplants at local nurseries may be lacking since the plants are so new, but you can check.

All-America Selections flower award winner

Arizona Apricot gaillardia (*Gaillardia x grandiflora* 'Arizona Apricot') offers a new and unique apricot color. Blooms have yellow edges that deepen to a rich apricot in the center. Judges noted the award-winning distinctive flower color of the 3- to 3.5-inch daisy-like flowers, described as exceptionally lovely and lighter in color than traditional gaillardia. The compact, 12-inch-tall plants offer bright green foliage and a tidy, uniform habit. Best in full sun.

All-America Selections bedding plant award winner

Summer Jewel Red salvia (*Salvia coccinea* 'Summer Jewel Red') was consistently rated "superior" or "above average" by the All-America Selections judges because of its early and generous flower blossoms that are produced from spring to autumn. The densely branching plants remain a tidy 20 inches tall and produce dark green leaves that are slightly finer textured than other types. The bright red flower spikes are covered with half-inch blooms that act as a magnet for hummingbirds. At just 50 days from sowing to first flower, Summer Jewel Red is approximately two weeks earlier than comparisons. This annual is ideal for full sun containers, mixed beds and borders where uniformity is desired.

All-America Selections cool-season bedding plant award winners

Glamour Red ornamental kale (*Brassica oleracea* 'Glamour Red') is the first All-America Selections winning kale (edible or ornamental) in 78 years of trials! This new F1 hybrid cultivar is an excellent achievement in breeding.

The leaves are uniquely shiny with a more intense, vivid color when compared to existing ornamental kales. Leaf coloring is best in full sun and when night temperatures fall below 55 degrees F, and it is hardy to the teens, so it is ideal to grow here during the fall, winter and spring cool season.

Shangri-La Marina viola (*Viola cornuta* 'Shangri-La Marina') is an F1 hybrid early flowering, mounding viola in a vibrant new color for violas. The 6-inch tall plants produce 1 1/4 inch blooms that have light blue petals with a velvety dark blue face surrounded by a narrow white border. This vigorous cool-season bedding plant provides a solid mat of color from fall until spring. Grow in full sun as a low edging in the garden or in hanging baskets and pots.

All-America Selections vegetable award winners

Hijinks pumpkin (*Cucurbita pepo* 'Hijinks') is a great new F1 hybrid cultivar that produces small-size, 6- to 7-pound fruits of a very uniform size and shape. Smooth, deep-orange skin with distinctive grooves gives a very classy appearance to fall decorations and is ideal for painting or carving. In trials, plants produced high yields and notable resistance to powdery mildew. Allow plenty of space in the garden for long vines that spread up to 15 feet. Early to mature, this pumpkin is ready for harvest in about 100 days from sowing or 85 days from transplant.

Lizzano tomato (*Solanum lycopersicum* 'Lizzano') is a vigorous semi-determinate, F1 hybrid tomato variety with a tidy, low-growing, trailing habit that is excellent for growing in patio containers or hanging baskets. In the garden, grow it in a short tomato cage. The plants grow 16 to 20 inches tall. In trials, Lizzano consistently produced abundant yields of high-quality, bright red, baby-cherry-size fruits (about 0.4 ounces). Judges noted better eating quality, yield and plant habit than comparisons. Lizzano is the first late blight tolerant, cherry fruited, semi-determinate variety on the market. Harvest begins 105 days from sowing seed or 63 days from transplant.

'Terenzo' (*Solanum lycopersicum* 'Terenzo') is a high-yielding, red, cherry-type tomato that is a prolific producer on a tidy, low-growing, trailing plant. The round, extra sweet fruit is approximately 1 1/4 inches wide – about the size of a typical cherry tomato. With a plant height of only 16 to 20 inches, this compact variety is suitable for growing in hanging baskets or containers on porches, decks or balconies.

Louisiana Super Plants

The Louisiana Super Plant program is a new educational and marketing campaign that highlights tough and beautiful plants that perform well in Louisiana landscapes. Louisiana Super Plants have a proven track record – having gone through several years of university evaluations and observations. In short, Louisiana Super Plants are “university tested and industry approved.”

Each spring and fall LSU AgCenter horticulturists unveil a list of Louisiana Super Plants, evaluated and selected for their superior performance throughout the state of Louisiana. Wholesale nurseries are encouraged to grow Louisiana Super Plants, and retail nurseries are encouraged to carry these plants. That way, when you hear about these outstanding plants, you should be able to find them at your local nurseries. Homeowners and professionals alike can benefit from using Louisiana Super Plants to ensure successful landscaping efforts.

Louisiana Super Plants for Spring 2011

Serena Series Angelonia (*Angelonia angustifolia*). This outstanding summer bedding plant can be relied on for dependable garden performance through the hottest summer weather. There are four soft colors in the Serena series that blend together beautifully – ‘Serena Purple,’ ‘Serena Lavender,’ ‘Serena Lavender Pink’ and ‘Serena White.’ Plants are compact, growing 12 to 14 inches tall and about as wide. Masses of flower spikes cover the plants from late spring to frost. Plant in sunny beds after danger of frost passes and the weather is warm and settled.

Butterfly Series Pentas (*Pentas lanceolata*). This F1 hybrid pentas is distinctive for its compact growth habit, larger flowers and excellent garden performance. Superb heat and humidity tolerance make this summer bedding plant a reliable choice for Louisiana gardeners. Clusters of five-petaled flowers are produced continuously all summer from spring to first frost. The series includes a variety of colors – ‘Butterfly Deep Rose,’ ‘Butterfly White,’ ‘Butterfly Blush,’ ‘Butterfly Deep Pink,’ ‘Butterfly Light Lavender,’ ‘Butterfly Lavender’ and ‘Butterfly Red.’ The flowers are rich with nectar and are highly attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds. Plant in full sun to partial shade.

Gardenia ‘Frostproof’ (*Gardenia jasminoides* ‘Frostproof’). This evergreen shrub produces fragrant, double, velvety, white flowers heavily in May and then sporadically through the summer. ‘Frostproof,’ as its name implies, is more cold hardy than other gardenias. It also has proven to be tough, adaptable and not as finicky. Growing about 5 feet tall and 4 feet wide, it is considered a compact gardenia. The leaves are somewhat smaller than most other gardenia cultivars, giving the plant an attractive medium to fine texture. Plant in acidic soil in full sun to partial shade.

Vitex ‘Shoal Creek’ (*Vitex agnus-castus* ‘Shoal Creek’). The 12 inch, fragrant flower spikes of deep lavender blue provide a wonderful addition to summer landscape color without the work involved with bedding plants. The flowers appear in May/June, and there is a second flush of flowers in August. This versatile plant blooms best in full sun and can be trained as a large shrub or small multitrunked tree about 10 to 15 feet tall and wide. ‘Shoal Creek’ vitex is more vigorous and produces larger flowers and deeper color than common vitex. Once established, it is very drought tolerant and fits well with a lower maintenance landscape. The flowers also are attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds.



Serena Series Angelonia



Butterfly Series Pentas



Gardenia ‘Frostproof’



Vitex ‘Shoal Creek’

Take advantage of educational opportunities

Many gardening organizations, public gardens and the LSU AgCenter have garden-related educational programs, classes, demonstrations, shows, plants sales, garden tours and a variety of other events over the next few months.

Make an effort to take advantage of these opportunities while they are available. It is amazing how much useful information you can pick up. These events are local, and the information is accurate for your particular area.

You also will be able to find unique plants at plant sales that may not be readily available from other sources. Of course, the chance to meet other gardeners, talk gardening and get new inspiration for working in your garden certainly is important.

Take some time out from working in your garden this spring to participate in these events. You'll be glad you did.

Ground covers for Louisiana landscapes

The term ground cover is applied to low-growing plants (other than turfgrass) that are used to cover areas of the landscape. Perennial, evergreen plants with a sprawling or spreading habit are most often used.

The plants used for ground covers generally are less than 12 inches high, but taller plants also are used appropriately in certain landscapes with a larger scale. You must carefully consider the characteristics you would like the ground cover to have (height, texture, color, etc.) when making your selection, as well as the growing conditions where it will be planted – such as sun or shade.

Don't forget to look at the size of the area to be planted, too. Only the most reliable, fast-spreading and reasonably priced ground covers should be considered for large areas.

For larger areas, monkey grass or mondo grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus*), creeping lily turf (*Liriope spicata*) and Japanese ardisia (*Ardisia japonica*) are good choices for partial shade to shade. Asiatic jasmine (*Trachelospermum asiaticum*) and liriope (*Liriope muscari*) are excellent for partial shade to sun.

Ground covers can reduce maintenance, beautify problem areas and create a whole new dimension in your landscape. Here are some recommendations for Louisiana.

Partial Shade to Shade: Choose from liriope (various varieties of *Liriope muscari*), creeping lily turf (*Liriope spicata*), monkey grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus*), Asian jasmine (*Trachelospermum asiaticum*), cast iron plant (*Aspidistra elatior*), English ivy (*Hedera helix*), Algerian ivy (*Hedera canariensis*), periwinkle (*Vinca major*, an excellent variegated form is available), ajuga (*Ajuga reptans*, use in small areas, since it is prone to crown rot), strawberry begonia (*Saxifraga stolonifera*), many ferns such as holly fern (*Cyrtomium falcatum*), wood fern (*Thelypteris kunthii*), sword fern (*Nephrolepis cordifolia*) and autumn fern (*Dryopteris erythrosora*), to name a few.

Partial Sun to Sun: Consider Lily-of-the-Nile (*Agapanthus*), sedum (*Sedum acre*, *S. Album*), low-growing junipers (*Juniperus chinensis procumbens* and *J. horizontalis* cultivars especially), dwarf lantanas, dwarf bamboo (*Arundinaria pygmaea*), daylily (*Hemerocallis*), wedelia (*Wedelia trilobata*, south Louisiana), perennial verbenas and yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*).

Louisiana Master Gardener volunteer program

The LSU AgCenter's Louisiana Master Gardener program plays an important role in meeting the horticulture needs of Louisiana residents and providing research-based information for the fastest-growing leisure-time activity in the nation – *gardening*.

Designed to recruit and train volunteers, the Louisiana Master Gardener program is open to anyone with a willingness to learn and a desire to help others. Instructional training for the Louisiana Master Gardener program is tailored for beginners and experienced gardeners.

In exchange for horticulture training, Master Gardeners contribute time as volunteers, working through their parish Extension offices, to develop and enhance community programs related to horticulture. Depending on community needs, these may include environmental improvement activities, parish fairs, plant health clinics, civic meetings and community and school gardening programs.

Enjoy the satisfaction that more than 1,700 citizens across the state are experiencing as a certified Louisiana Master Gardener. To learn how you can become a Master Gardener, contact the LSU AgCenter Extension office in your parish or visit our website: www.LSUAgCenter.com/MasterGardener

René G. Schmit
Louisiana Master Gardener
Coordinator



An educational program of the LSU AgCenter

Plant warm-season bedding plants for summer color

Warm-season bedding plants grow and flower best during April through October, and we can begin planting them as early as late March in south Louisiana. Gardeners who planted cool-season bedding plants generally will wait for those plants to begin to fade in late April or May, however, before removing those and replacing them with warm-season bedding plants.

Tender perennials, such as impatiens, periwinkles, blue daze, pentas and begonias, are used as bedding plants along with true annuals, but these plants have far more stamina and “staying power” in the summer flower garden. They make outstanding bedding plants, often blooming from late spring until cool weather arrives in fall. Sometimes they survive the winter to grow and bloom another year. True annuals, on the other hand, rarely make it all the way through our exceptionally long summer growing season.

Choose annuals well suited to the growing conditions of the location where they will be planted. While most annuals need full sun (at least eight hours of direct sun) to partial sun (about six hours of direct sun), some thrive in partial shade (about four hours of direct sun) or shade (about two hours of direct sun). Even annuals that like partial shade to shady locations, however, will generally not perform as well in full shade, where they receive no direct sun. Caladiums, planted from tubers or growing plants, are one of the best choices for color in full shade.

Prepare your beds carefully before putting in summer bedding plants. First, eliminate any weeds or other unwanted plants. Next, turn the soil to a depth of at least 8 inches. Spread a 2- to 4-inch layer of compost, rotted leaves, aged manure, finely ground pine bark or peat moss over the bed, and then evenly sprinkle a light application of a granular or organic all-purpose fertilizer. Thoroughly blend the organic matter and fertilizer into the bed and rake smooth. Then you're ready to plant.

Make sure you plant the transplants no deeper than they were growing in the original containers and at the proper spacing. Annual plantings are not low maintenance, and you should keep in mind the care they will need when deciding where, how large and how many beds you will plant. Mulch will reduce problems with weeds, but regular weeding still will be necessary. Regular watering, pest control and grooming (removing dead flowers and unattractive leaves) will keep them looking their best. In containers, hanging baskets and window boxes, annuals need regular watering and fertilization. Invite a rainbow into your garden this summer – plant a flower garden.

Here are some excellent choices for summer flower beds in Louisiana. Those marked with an asterisk (*) are tender perennials.

Warm-season Bedding Plants for Sun to Partial Sun (6 to 8 hours of direct sun): Abelmoschus, Ageratum, Amaranthus, Balsam, Blue Daze*, Celosia, Cleome, Coleus (sun-tolerant types), Coreopsis, Cosmos, Dahlberg Daisy, Dusty Miller*, Gaillardia, Gomphrena, Lantana*, Lisianthus, Marigold, Melampodium, Narrow-leaf Zinnia, Ornamental Pepper*, Periwinkle*, Pentas*, Portulaca, Purslane*, Rudbeckia, Salvia*, Scaevola*, Sunflower, Tithonia, Torenia, Perennial Verbena and Zinnia.

Warm-season Bedding Plants for Partial Shade to Shade (2 to 4 hours of direct sun): Balsam, Begonia*, Browallia*, Caladium (perennial tuber), Cleome, Coleus*, Impatiens*, Pentas*, Salvia* and Torenia.



Bronze Pagoda Coleus



Lavender Blue Halo Periwinkle

Use insecticides properly

As the weather warms, a number of insect pests become more active. Many people still feel they should immediately get an insecticide and begin spraying when they see insects or some apparent insect damage in gardens, but just seeing an insect or insect damage is not reason enough to spray.

The insect you see may not be harmful or may not cause enough damage to warrant the use of an insecticide. It may even be a beneficial insect. And if the damage is old and the pest has already come and gone, spraying won't do any good.

Before you decide to use an insecticide, it is important to identify the insect causing the damage. Otherwise, you may spray the wrong insecticide or use an insecticide when it was not needed. Remember that no single insecticide will control all insect pests. Indiscriminate spraying may kill beneficial predatory insects that are eating pests on your plants, and this actually can cause pest problems to develop or become worse. In such a case, you will have wasted time and effort and destroyed a friend rather than a pest.

It is essential to read the entire label before purchasing and using an insecticide. This is the best way to be certain it will control the pest situation you are dealing with. If the label does not have specific information covering how you intend to use the insecticide, put it back and find a product that does. The label also will tell you how much to use and how to mix and apply it safely.

Pay careful attention to the safety precautions that must be taken, such as wearing protective clothing. Some insecticides have restrictions for use on certain plants and at certain temperatures. If you don't follow those, the product might cause the plants damage rather than helping them. You should read all of this before buying the pesticide. When applying insecticides (or any pesticides) to food crops, check to label to see how many days you must wait from treatment to harvesting.

You also should use an effective insecticide that is the safest and least toxic. Check the label of the insecticide container for one of three words. "Caution" denotes the least toxic category of pesticides. "Warning" appears on the labels of the next most toxic category, and "danger" is on the labels of the most toxic.

The control method must be directed toward the pest. If the insect lives and feeds on the underside of the foliage, your spray should be directed there. If it lives on the trunk and branches, a light spray on the foliage will not be effective. Spray only the infested plants and those nearby of the same kind. Do not spray everything in your landscape just because a few plants are infested.

Identifying insect pests and other problems in the garden is a major problem for home gardeners. Contact the LSU AgCenter Extension office in your parish; the county agent located there can help you diagnose the problem and come up with an appropriate control strategy.

Checklist for March, April and May

1. Plant warm-season bedding plants beginning in mid-March (south Louisiana) or mid-April (north Louisiana). For best results, plant petunias by mid-March and wait to plant periwinkles (vinca) until late April.
2. After spring bulbs that reliably rebloom each year have finished flowering, wait until the foliage turns yellow before cutting it off. Food is being manufactured in the leaves 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. Coleus is a great annual bedding plant for Louisiana's landscapes. Try some of the newer sun-loving varieties.
6. Fertilize shrubs during the spring 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 oil 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 may be a problem if a vegetable garden is nearby.
10. Garden centers will have many crape myrtles during May and June. Plant these shrubs and trees (depending on the variety you select) for great flowering all summer. Most varieties also have exfoliating, colored bark.
11. If your crape myrtles have had problems with crape myrtle aphids and the unattractive, black sooty mold they cause, treat your trees now to prevent problems this summer. Apply a drench of imidacloprid insecticide to the base of the tree, and the tree will be protected from aphids all summer.

*Dan Gill
Consumer Horticulture*

Turfgrasses and Lawns

Lawn weed control

Herbicides can be effective tools for reducing weeds in your yard, but the best weed control is a thick healthy lawn. An agent in your parish LSU AgCenter Extension Service office can advise you on fertilizer and other cultural practices that will improve the overall health of your lawn.

Weed preventer or pre-emergence herbicides may be applied safely in late winter and early spring to all established southern lawns. These products usually are granular and should be applied with drop or broadcast spreaders and watered in soon after application.

Pre-emergence herbicides are effective in reducing the emergence of several annual grasses like crabgrass and goosegrass, which are common grassy weeds in lawns throughout the state. These herbicides work before you see the weeds infesting your lawn, but timing is everything with the pre-emergence type of herbicides. You have to apply them before the weeds germinate.

Residents in the New Orleans area and other extreme southern areas of the state should apply pre-emergence herbicides around Valentine's Day or a few days after. The window for applying pre-emergence herbicides further north in Louisiana is late February to early March.

Some pre-emergence herbicide trade names to look for are Green Light Crabgrass Preventer, Scott's Halts and Hi-Yield Crabgrass Preventer with Dimension.

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 and 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. These herbicides are widely available and can be used on most southern grasses. Be extra careful, however, when using them on St. Augustine grass when the weather gets warmer. Some examples of trimec-type broadleaf herbicides are Bayer Advanced Southern Broadleaf Herbicide, Ortho Weed B Gon Max for Southern Lawns and Fertilome Weed Free Zone.

Most herbicide labels will stress the use of these products on younger weeds at temperatures below 85 degrees. Even when used as directed, a temporary discoloration of the lawn may occur following the use of these herbicides. Follow the manufacturer's recommendation for the amount of water and spray material to cover a given area as well as the recommendations regarding mowing practices before and after the herbicide application.

Some product manufacturers will recommend a follow-up spray two or three weeks after the first application. 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.

Weed and feed herbicides can be used at the time 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. Applying weed and feed too early (late February to early March) may encourage outbreaks of brown patch disease. Be sure to read and follow product label recommendations.

*Ron Strahan, PhD
Weed Scientist/Turfgrass Specialist*



The advertisement for the LSU AgCenter Plant Diagnostic Center features a collage of images. At the top right is the LSU AgCenter Research & Extension logo. Below it is a close-up of a green plant with yellow flowers. In the center, there is a photograph of a microscope. To the right of the microscope, the text reads: "Plant problems caused by various biotic and abiotic factors may result in severe yield losses. Plant problems caused by different agents may exhibit similar symptoms or those caused by similar agents may show different symptoms. Misdiagnosis of these problems may add to the losses, significantly increase cost of production and decrease profits. Accurate and rapid diagnosis is required for selecting the best management practices at the most effective time." At the bottom of the advertisement is a photograph of a dirt path winding through a field of green plants. The text "LSUAgCenter.com/PlantDiagnostics" is overlaid at the bottom.

LSU AgCenter Plant Diagnostic Center

Plant problems caused by various biotic and abiotic factors may result in severe yield losses. Plant problems caused by different agents may exhibit similar symptoms or those caused by similar agents may show different symptoms. Misdiagnosis of these problems may add to the losses, significantly increase cost of production and decrease profits. Accurate and rapid diagnosis is required for selecting the best management practices at the most effective time.

LSUAgCenter.com/PlantDiagnostics

Nuts

Cultural management of pecan trees in the home landscape

For many homeowners, their vision of planting a pecan tree is to grow a tree large enough to provide shade for outdoor activities and produce a large crop of delicious nuts every fall. What they fail to consider, however, are some of the challenges associated with growing pecan trees in an urban setting.

Pecan trees grow to be very large trees at maturity and can completely overwhelm the residential landscape. They also are relatively high-maintenance trees based on the amount of resources required to keep the trees healthy and producing a consistent, quality crop.

One of the most common mistakes homeowners make probably is not giving pecan trees enough room to grow properly. If your goal is to maximize nut production, no object, whether it is another tree or structure, should be located close enough to shade any portion of the pecan tree.

Of course, another benefit of not crowding your pecan tree is the increased air circulation around and through the tree. Why is this important? Air movement through the tree canopy dries the foliage, providing an unfavorable environment for the development of pecan scab, one of the most damaging fungal diseases of pecans. Boxed-in pecan trees are more prone to scab because the leaves and nuts stay wet for longer periods of time.

Neglected pecan trees can pose a hazard to people and property. Trees that are not properly trained when young have a tendency to develop narrow, forked lower branches. With age, these trees are at risk of splitting during a storm. Late winter, when the trees are completely dormant, is the normal time to correct structural defects and remove dead wood, but pruning can be done any time of the year, if necessary.



In its native habitat, the pecan tree prefers to grow in the rich alluvial flood plains of rivers and streams. This gives an indication that they will thrive best in well-drained, nutrient-rich soil. Soil acts as a “vault” to store water for crop use. The deeper the soil you have, the larger the vault for storing water. Well-drained, sandy soils require and tolerate more water than clay soils with slower internal drainage.

Generally, coarse, sandy soils can store only about 0.5 inch of water per foot of depth. Silty loam soils can store more than five times that much, or 2.5 inches per foot of depth. Other soil types, including heavy clays, will fall in a range between 0.5 and 2.5 inches per foot of depth.

Organic matter percentage also influences water-holding capacity. As the percentage increases, the water-holding capacity increases because of the affinity organic matter has for water.

Irrigation and rain fill the soil reservoir or bring the soil moisture content up to field capacity to store water for tree use. Thus, the depth of the root zone and the soil type must be known to determine how much irrigation water is needed.

For a homeowner, one of the most important practices to successfully grow a pecan tree is to provide adequate water during the growing season. Generally, water will have more of an influence on pecan production than any other environmental factor, particularly where nut quality is concerned. Insufficient water or drought stress will affect nut size, nut filling and kernel quality, as well as leaf

and shoot growth. Adequate soil moisture is important at bud break for stimulating strong, vigorous growth; from bloom through shell hardening for nut size; and during the nut filling stage for optimizing kernel percentage. If trees do not receive adequate soil moisture levels late in the season, shuck split and energy reserves are affected. Lack of sufficient water during the nut filling stage will lead to poorly filled nuts, poor nut quality and increased alternate bearing.

The nut sizing period normally occurs from May 1 through Aug. 1. Even though this is not a critical water-use stage for pecans, serious drought conditions during this period can affect yield. The most common visible effects of an extended drought during this period are excessive nut drop and “shell hardening” on small nuts. When a pecan tree begins to stress, whether it be from lack of water, an insect infestation or disease, the tree generally will respond by shedding some or the majority of its nut crop.

Lack of sufficient water during the nut sizing period also may lead to water stage fruit split, which results from a sudden influx of water during the nut filling stage in some varieties. The nut filling stage occurs from about Aug. 1 to the first week of October, depending on variety. The most critical period for water use is during the first two weeks of September.

It is possible to identify trees that didn't receive sufficient water when they are being harvested during the fall. Trees undergoing stress at some point during the year may have dropped their nuts early, produced smaller pecans or fewer pecans or have pecan hulls which failed to open properly (sticktight).

Because a pecan tree has such an expansive root system, every effort should be made to water the entire surface area covered by the tree canopy. The water needs of a pecan tree will vary from 1 inch per week during the spring to more than 2 inches per week during the summer. Rainfall shouldn't be your primary irrigation source; rainfall should be supplemental to mechanized irrigation practices on your tree.

For trees planted in lawns, do not rely on sprinklers to water both the grass and trees. The use of a lawn sprinkler system may supplement deep watering, however. To deep water your tree, run a soaker or water hose at the dripline on a prescribed schedule. Make sure the entire root zone, including 3 feet beyond the dripline, receives deep moisture regardless of the irrigation system used. It's a no-brainer that smaller, younger pecan trees will require less water than mature trees, but do not underestimate their water requirements. A mature tree has an extensive root system to harvest moisture from a substantial area, while a young tree's roots may only spread 2 to 3 feet from the trunk.

Weed competition often results in poor growth or even death of young pecan trees. Bermuda grass and Johnson grass are especially severe competitors, but numerous other grasses and weeds can result in poor tree growth. Pecan trees will make the best growth in the first

few years after planting if a circle 6 feet in diameter is kept weed-free with glyphosate herbicide, hand cultivation or mulch.

Chemical weed killers (herbicides) should be used with extreme caution and in complete accordance with label directions. Numerous mulches can be used, including pine straw, bark or synthetic weed-barrier cloth. If the tree is in a lawn where a weed-free circle is undesirable, compensate by applying extra water and fertilizer and by mowing often to help reduce grass competition.

As the tree develops a larger canopy, the shade helps suppress the growth and competition of grass for water and nutrients. Lawn grasses vary in their tolerance to shade. St. Augustine and tall fescue are the only common turfgrasses that consistently grow well under a thick shade canopy.

Standard fertilization of lawns near and beneath pecan trees may supply much of the fertilization requirements of both trees and lawn. But additional fertilizer probably will be necessary to supply nutrient requirements during years with large nut crops. Fertilizer should be applied by broadcasting over the root zone of the pecan tree. Pecan roots usually extend beyond the limb spread of the tree. Be careful when applying fertilizer; try to avoid applications in narrow bands or clumps, which could result in injury to lawn grasses or tree roots.

There are a large number of fertilizers available today, and choosing what type of fertilizer to use can be confusing. All fertilizers are labeled with three numbers that indicate the guaranteed analysis or the fertilizer grade. These three numbers give the percentage by weight of nitrogen (N), phosphate (P_2O_5) and potash (K_2O). Often, these numbers are said to represent nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, or N-P-K, but remember that it is not N-P-K, but N- P_2O_5 - K_2O .

For example, in a 100 pound bag of fertilizer labeled 10-10-10, there are 10 pounds of nitrogen, 10 pounds of phosphate and 10 pounds of potash. This fertilizer actually would contain 10 pounds of nitrogen, 4.3 pounds of phosphorus and 8.3 pounds of potassium. Other nutrients contained in the fertilizer will be listed on the bag, as well. These analyses allow the grower to select a fertilizer that contains the nutrients necessary for the specific situation.

The type or form the fertilizer comes in is called the formulation. Some of the formulations available to homeowners include water-soluble powders, liquids, slow-release pellets, slow-release spikes, tablets and granular solids. Fertilizer formulation can affect the quality of results. Granular and liquid formulations can be applied evenly and distributed to the entire root system. Spikes, pellets or fertilizer packets are convenient to use but concentrate the fertilizer in one spot, which may lead to some root burn from excessive fertilizer.

*Charlie Graham, PhD
Pecan Extension Specialist*

Vegetable Gardening

Vegetables to Plant in March

Direct plant snap beans, Swiss chard, radishes, lettuce, collards, mustards, turnips, cabbage, broccoli and sweet corn seeds. Plant tomatoes, peppers and eggplant transplants. Plant cantaloupes, squash, cucumbers and watermelons well after danger of frost is over; this is usually after March 15 in south Louisiana and closer to April 1 in north Louisiana.

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.

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

There is no better time to start thinking about your spring vegetable garden than now.

Start browsing seed catalogues and local nurseries for new varieties of vegetables to grow. Ordering seed is the first step in prepping for a spring garden.

You'll also have to remove fall vegetables that have not yet been harvested, remove any weeds and till the soil. Remember to till at least 8 inches into the ground for adequate root growth on vegetable crops.

Take a SOIL SAMPLE prior to adjusting pH and fertilizer! Soil varies in different parts of the state, so have your soil checked at least every three years! Soil samples can be sent to the LSU AgCenter's soil testing lab on the LSU campus in Baton Rouge (www.LSUAgCenter.com/soiltest).

Once you've done all that, apply pre-plant fertilizer, if needed, then irrigate and wait two weeks to plant! See the planting guidelines and suggestions that follow for dates to plant particular crops.

Crop Highlights

Sweet corn. Planting corn early helps reduce problems from corn earworms. 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 with 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 ¾-1½ pounds of ammonium nitrate when the plants are about 12 inches high and again when the plants are 24-36 inches high. One pint of fertilizer is about 1 pound.

Dust or spray silks with Sevin about 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. The recommended regular early maturing variety is Seneca Horizon. Midseason varieties are Funks G90, Gold Queen or Merit. Late-season regular varieties are Silver Queen (white), Lochief, NK199 or Golden Cross Bantam. Three ounces of seed will plant 100 feet of row.

If you love to eat fresh corn on the cob, try the improved super sweet (Sh₂) and enhanced (EH) (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; 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.

Many new high-sugar modern varieties are commonly available. The best include (early) Platinum Lady, White Out, Xtra-Tender 372, Temptation, Sweet Ice, Bodacious, Sweet Riser, Dazzle, Lancelot and Precious Gem; (midseason) Argent, Devotion, GSS966, Passion, BSS982 or 977, Snowbelle, Summer Sweet (7630Y, 7210, 8102), Honey Select, Crisp N Sweet 711, Incredible, Prime Plus, Big Time, Sweet Chorus and Sweet Rhythum; and (late or long season) Even Sweeter, Pegasus, Tahoe and Silver King.

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 snaps for Louisiana are Ambra, Bronco, Contender, Pod Squad, Valentino, Dusky, Festina, Hialea, Magnum, Storm, Strike, Provider and Bush Blue Lake 274. An All-America Selection 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 the yellow wax beans should choose Golden Rod Wax, Goldmine or Golden Improved.

One-half pound of seed will be more than enough to plant a 100-foot row. Plant seed about 1-2 inches apart in the row.

High temperatures at bloom 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 F and 90-95 percent humidity.

Pole snap bean varieties produce larger yields, since they produce for a longer period than bush varieties. Space seed about 6-12 inches apart. About 2-3 ounces of seed will plant a 100-foot row. For pole snaps, the All-America Selection winner is Kentucky Blue. Blue Lake KY Wonder 191, Dade, 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. Begin transplanting plants in mid-March in south Louisiana or at the end of March in north Louisiana after the danger of frost is over. If a frost occurs, you will need to cover the newly planted transplants! To avoid severe damage from disease and insects, spray tomatoes after fruit set every seven to 10 days with a fungicide (Daconil or Maneb) and an insecticide (Sevin or Malathion).

Plant tomatoes in a well-drained site that receives 6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight. When tomatoes receive too little sunlight, few blossoms are formed, and many that do form fall off before setting any fruit. Space tomato plants 18-24 inches apart. When transplanting, pour about 1 cup of a starter solution in the hole. Make your own by mixing ½ cup of a complete fertilizer (8-8-8) in 2½ gallons of warm water and stirring completely. This will encourage a strong root system and faster growth.

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 field.

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, Elf, Elfin, Navidad, Cupid, Mountain Belle and St. Nick (cherry).

Determinants have very productive vines that grow to heights of 4 feet. Stems terminate in a flower cluster. 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, Fla. 47 or 91, Mountain Spring, Cherry Grande (cherry), Floralina, Mountain Fresh and Mountain Crest. Also try Sun Master, Sunleaper, Summer Flavor 6000, Mountain Spring and Phoenix.

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

Bell peppers and eggplants. 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 12-18 inches and eggplants about 18-24 inches.

Recommended non-hybrid varieties of bell peppers for Louisiana are Capistrano, Jupiter and Purple Beauty.

Recommended hybrids are Revolution, Heritage and the large King Arthur, Valencia, Paladin and Plato. For a yellow bell, try Orobelle, Summer Gold, Valencia or Summer Sweet 8610. For a mature red bell, try Camelot (X3R) or Aristotle.

Producing yellow and red bell peppers is difficult in our humid conditions. Note: Spotted wilt virus has hindered bell pepper production



in many areas. The varieties Stilleto, Patriot and Excursion II are resistant to tomato spotted wilt virus. Try these varieties if you had trouble producing bell peppers.

Recommended hybrid eggplant varieties are Fairy Tale, Night Shadow, Blackbell, Calliope, Classic, Epic, Dusky, Santana, Rossita 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.

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 these outside 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 Taledaga, Dasher II, Fanfare AAS, Diva AAS, General Lee, Speedway, Poinsett 76, Slice More, Thunder, Indy, Intimidator, Sweet Slice and Sweet Success.

For pickling, try Calypso, Fancipak and Jackson.

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

Recommended yellow straight-neck are Goldbar, Liberator III,

Enterprise, Cougar, Multipik, Patriot II, Superpik, Fortune and Lemondrop.

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

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

Recommended hard shell (winter) squash varieties are Waltham, Butternut, Butternut Supreme, Early Butternut, Ultra Butternut, Tay Belle Acorn, Cream of Crop Acorn (AAS), Table Queen, Table King (AAS) 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 crook-neck); Liberator and Conqueror (yellow straight neck); and Declaration, Payroll, Judgment III, Revenue and Independence (zucchini).

Recommended cantaloupe varieties are Aphrodite, Athena, Primo, Magnum 45, Super 45, Ambrosia, Earlidew or Honey Max.

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, Starbrite, and Summer Flavor 800, 710 or 500. Seedless: Revolution, Summer Sweet 5244, TriX Carousel or 313, Cooperstown, Millionaire, Crimson Trio, Laurel and Nova. Ice Box Type: Sugar Baby and Mickeylee. Yellow: Gold Strike, Tendersweet, Desert King and Butter Cup.

Apply 2-3 pounds of 8-24-24 or similar fertilizer per 100-foot row before planting. Side-dress with $\frac{3}{4}$ -1 pound of ammonium nitrate or $1\frac{1}{2}$ -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 fruits from each plant when they reach 4-5 inches in diameter.

Pumpkins are much like winter squash, but the flesh is often coarser and stronger. For a small size, choose Touch of Autumn or Orange Smoothie. Recommended medium-size pumpkins are 20 Karat Gold and Hannibal. Recommended large or jack-o'-lantern types are Contastoga,

Mustang or Cinderella.

See the article on LSU AgCenter's website http://www.lsuagcenter.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 this 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 $\frac{3}{4}$ pint ammonium nitrate per 100-foot row as vines begin to run. Weekly applications of a general-purpose fungicide (Daconil or Maneb) and insecticide (Sevin or

Thiodan) 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 F) 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 seed 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, Florida Butter, 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 potatoes 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 requires a sandy soil.

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

Recommended varieties are Louisiana Green Velvet, Emerald, Annie Oakley (hybrid), Cowhorn, Cajun Delight-AAS, Burgundy and Clemson Spineless. Each of these varieties is semidwarf – except Louisiana Green Velvet.

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 bulbs, garlic and shallots in 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 45-50 F and 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.

Mulching

Remember to mulch your garden. There are several mulch options including black plastic, leaves and pine straw. Using mulch has several benefits. It reduces weed germination. It also prevents soil from splashing on your vegetable leaves and fruit, which, in turn, reduces insect and disease damage. And it adds organic matter to your soil – improving the soil's health and tilth.

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Small yard? You can still enjoy homegrown tomatoes



Do you enjoy the taste of a homegrown tomato but have a small yard or no yard at all? If yes, then this is the research study for you.

Twelve varieties of tomatoes were grown in 3-gallon containers to determine the best tomato for patio growers. The majority of varieties were chosen because they are determinate tomatoes. Other varieties grown in this study were chosen because they had unique characteristics that a home gardener values.

Unlike indeterminate tomatoes, determinate tomatoes have a flowering terminal point that usually prevents them from growing taller than 5 feet. Determinate tomatoes are well suited to containers because they do not become top-heavy in a container.

The tomato plants were grown in 3-gallon containers with drainage holes. Plants were grown in 56-inch standard tomato cages available at all local nurseries. A peat-based soil was used as the medium.

The pots were all fertilized with Osmocote Plus Multi-Purpose Plant Food (15-9-12) at a rate of 1 tablespoon per container. This fertilizer was chosen because it is a slow-release fertilizer (six months) that contains micronutrients. Tomatoes are heavy users of micronutrients, so using a fertilizer with micronu-

trients is best. The plants also were fertilized weekly with Miracle Grow water-soluble all-purpose plant food (24-8-16). This fertilizer was applied through the Miracle Grow feeder on a garden hose and applied to the foliage and roots of each plant.

Insect problems were encountered; the cucumber beetle became a problem early in the study. Sevin was applied to plants to control the insect population. The only other insects that were a problem were stink bugs that arrived toward the end of the study, so no control measures were taken.

Fruit were harvested, counted and weighed once a week from June 7 to July 12. The 12 varieties studied were Supertasty, Health Kick hybrid, Sweet Tangerine, Patio Princess, Fresh Salsa, Bush Steak, Ensalada, Italian Ice, Celebrity, Heat Wave II, Yellow Magic and Porter House. The roma types were Health Kick hybrid, Ensalada and Fresh Salsa. Yellow Magic, an indeterminate tomato, was a yellow, bell-pepper-shaped tomato, sweet tangerine was an orange tomato and Italian Ice was a cherry tomato that was light yellow to white when harvested.

The three top-producing tomatoes based on the number of tomatoes were Italian Ice, Patio Princess and Health Kick hybrid. The top three tomatoes in terms of pounds harvested were Super Tasty, Health Kick and Patio Princess. Italian Ice tomatoes were cherry tomatoes, so their weight prevented the variety from being in the top three for pounds of tomatoes produced.

Out of a panel of 40 taste testers, the top choice for best-tasting tomato was awarded to the Heat Wave II variety. My personal favorite tomato for color both inside and out was the Sweet Tangerine variety. It was bright orange on the outside and inside with little to no blemishes. The Bush Steak, Patio Princess and Health Kick hybrids had a firm white center on the inside, which is not considered desirable.

Fresh Salsa was a firm tomato with no "jelly." It lives up to its name as far as making a salsa with the tomato.

The Ensalada, Heat Wave II and Supertasty had nice color on the outside and inside. But the insides of these varieties had small white blotches throughout. The white blotches did not affect flavor.

Italian Ice tomatoes were between a yellow and white color on the inside and outside with little to no blemishes.

The Celebrity, Yellow Magic and Porter House were the poorest performers of all the selected tomatoes. The Celebrity and Porter House were not firm and were poor producers in containers. Overall, the Yellow Magic variety never yielded tomatoes. It was all foliage but no fruit – although I did harvest five fruit one week from these plants. The fruit were very small and not worth the effort of growing in a container.

Overall, if you are looking for good color and good yields, I would suggest planting Sweet Tangerine. Even though Sweet Tangerine was not in the top three varieties for number or pounds produced, it did have good yields and was beautiful inside and out. If you are looking strictly for flavor, plant the Heat Wave II. Not many tomatoes have beaten Celebrity in taste from the variety trials conducted in the LSU AgCenter. Finally, if you are looking for a high producing tomato in a container, plant Patio Princess.

Some growing changes I'll make for the next tomato study include using a heavier media. The media used in this study was primarily composed of peat moss. I think using a basic potting soil would have yielded better results. I also will use saucers under the containers. During the hot summer months, container plants dry out quickly. If I'd used saucers, I might have had to water less frequently because the water would have been prevented from running out of the bottom of the pot. Also, a 3-gallon container was not quite large enough once the plants matured. I would recommend a 5-gallon container.

Kathryn Fontenot, PhD
Community/School Vegetable Gardens

Planning the home fruit planting

A well maintained fruit planting can be productive and also enhance the beauty of the landscape of a home in a variety of ways – from attractive blossoms and interesting shapes and foliage to delicious fruit and beautiful fall color.

Fruit trees, bushes, and vines are long lived and require patient care to give years of production. Fruit trees can be easily integrated into the “edible landscape” without designating a specific area as a fruit orchard.

Success with a home fruit planting depends on how carefully a plan is designed and how well it is implemented. Good quality fruit cannot be grown without careful attention to care and management of the plants. Success will depend largely on variety selection, soil management, pruning, fertilization, irrigation, pest control and other cultural practices. The size of a planting should be determined by the space available, site characteristics, size of the family and the time that can be devoted to maintenance of the planting.

It is essential to stress the importance of selecting crops that are well adapted to the climate



and environment of Louisiana. Fruit crops that perform well in the home landscape with few or no pesticide sprays should be emphasized. Ease of care needs to be the primary consideration in selecting which crops to grow. A sustainable, low-input, edible landscape accommodates the lifestyle of most homeowners and harmonizes with environmental concerns.

Locating the fruit planting close to the house will make observation and care both practical and convenient.

Decisions regarding size, site and management of the home fruit planting need to be made well in advance of planting. Before planting is an important time to gather information about the potential fruit species.

It is very important to consider the mature size of the fruit tree or bush when designing a planting. Many small nursery trees are planted near buildings and fences; then the tree quickly grows too large for the space.

Sunlight also is an important aspect in fruit production. Anything less than full sunlight can result in reduced production.

Where space is limited, fruit plants may be set in almost any location suitable for ornamental plants.

Site selection

All fruit crops perform best in full sun. Choose a site that will receive sunlight most of the day during the growing season. As the hours of sunlight a fruit tree receives diminish, so does the productivity of the plant. In most cases, sunlight is needed for the tree to set and properly develop fruit buds. Also, sunlight is needed to furnish energy to the fruit in the form of sugars from photosynthesis.

Another important consideration is drainage. Adequate drainage is the most important soil characteristic. Poor soils can be improved by proper fertilization and cultural practices, but improving soil with poor internal drainage is difficult and expensive. Fertile soil is desirable, and deep,

well-drained soil is vital.

Determine the soil's internal drainage rate by digging a hole 8 inches in diameter and about 2 feet deep. Fill the hole with water. If the hole drains in 24 hours, the soil has excellent drainage and is suitable for all fruit crops. If the hole drains in 36 hours, the internal drainage is adequate for more tolerant crops, such as figs, blueberries, strawberries, grapes, pecans and blackberries. Choose persimmons, citrus and pears for more poorly drained sites. If the hole has not drained in 36-48 hours, the site is unsuitable for fruit production. Planting a fruit tree on a raised berm can increase longevity and productivity.

After evaluating the planting site, select fruit varieties that are adapted to your area of Louisiana. Consult experienced fruit producers and local LSU AgCenter Extension Service agents who can recommend varieties for the area.

Select different varieties to extend the harvest of ripe fruit during the growing season. Selecting early, mid- and late-season varieties will allow for an extended harvest season and will not produce an overabundant supply of fruit at any one time.

Remember that some fruit crops require at least two varieties planted in the same vicinity for cross-pollination. For example, only one blackberry variety is required for production, but at least two rabbiteye blueberry varieties are required to ensure cross-pollination.

Size of planting area

Your planting area should be determined by space, site, family size, the time you have available to dedicate to management of the planting and pollination requirements. The range of fruits planted should depend on family preference, adaptability and space. It is better to have a small, well-tended home fruit planting than a large, neglected one.

*David Himelrick, PhD
Horticulturist*

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Post Office Box 25100
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70894-5100

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Kathryn Fontenot, Ph.D., Community/School Vegetable Gardens
Dan Gill, Consumer Horticulture
Charles Graham, Ph.D., Nuts
David Himelrick, Ph.D., Fruits
Ron Strahan, Ph.D., Lawns

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School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences
155 J. C. Miller Hall - LSU, Post Office Box 25100, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70894-5100
(225)578-2222; Fax: (225)578-0773

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