Horticulture Hints





Spring 2006

LSU AgCenter Research & Extension

Louisiana Master Gardener Volunteer Program

Gardening is the number one pastime in United States. Learn new gardening skills and enjoy volunteering in your community by becoming a Louisiana Master Gardener.

The Louisiana Master Gardener program is a volunteer project of the LSU AgCenter. Classes are conducted in 20 parishes throughout the state. Each class covers one or two topics, and the series usually takes three months to complete. There is a $55 state fee for the course, and individual parish programs may charge an additional class activity fee.

All Master Gardener volunteers are asked to perform a minimum number of required volunteer hours and continuing education hours each year to maintain their certification. For more information, contact your parish LSU AgCenter extension office.

Louisiana Master Gardener extension volunteers have accomplished much in their communities. In the Monroe area, for example, volunteers have worked with Mangham Junior High School to create an outdoor environment that both enhances the appearance of the school and functions as an outdoor classroom for math and science classes.

Master Gardeners also are strong supporters of the popular LSU AgCenter's Ag Alley, held in conjunction with the annual AgExpo in Monroe. Each year, thousands of youth and adult visitors learn about Louisiana agriculture.

Students attending the Ouachita Parish Alternative Center learn where food comes by planting 4-feet x 4-feet vegetable gardens.

Gardening complements math, science and English curricula by helping reduce ADHD symptoms and building self-esteem.

In St. Tammany parish, Master Gardeners present seminar topics and conduct a Plant Health Care Clinic at the Northshore Spring Garden Show.

St. Tammany volunteers also participate in a city-wide effort to take plants destined to be destroyed by city roadway and construction projects and transplant them in municipal sites like city hall, the community center and the Tyler Thomas Memorial Playground.

At the Slidell Memorial Hospital, Master Gardeners have proposed, developed and maintained a unique garden space created for patients requiring recreational therapy as part of their medical rehabilitation.

The space is entirely container-planted for patient access. Master Gardeners partnered with the Eden Isles Garden Club to make this wonderful addition to the hospital.

Natchitoches Parish Master Gardeners have provided donated plants and planting expertise to complete a Habitat for Humanity house. They also have advised the new homeowners on plant maintenance and establishing a lawn.

In hurricane devastated Orleans Parish, volunteers assisted City Park Botanical Garden personnel with removing storm-damaged plants and replanting new gardens.

East Baton Rouge Parish Master Gardeners develop and produce gardening programs and use their speaker's bureau to present those topics at public libraries, garden clubs, civic organizations and public events.

Thirteen community gardens receive volunteer assistance in the Baton Rouge area, including Habitat for Humanity, Baton Rouge Botanic Garden, LSU Hilltop Arboretum, McMain's Development Center and the Magnolia Mound Plantation Kitchen Garden.

Tangipahoa Parish Master Gardeners have volunteered at 26 schools to teach 4-H youth about growing hydroponic lettuce and the importance of a healthy diet. Volunteers assist with the state's annual conference in April.

In the River Region, St. Charles volunteers have established and maintain a heritage vegetable garden at Destrehan Plantation, complete with tours and gardening information. They work closely with their parish's park system and public schools.

Lafayette Parish Master Gardeners work diligently on their Children's Garden and have conducted 28 outdoor classes for area students.

In the Shreveport area, Extreme Garden Makeover, a gardening contest, is a learning experience used to teach people about growing gardens. Master Gardeners, Shreveport Green and several generous sponsors have made the event possible. The winner's garden will be video taped, and Southern Living will provide a landscape plan.

Master Gardeners' annual spring garden tour exposes guests to several private gardens in the Shreveport and Bossier area, while promoting good gardening practices to the public.

Learning and sharing your gardening knowledge as a Louisiana Master Gardener in your community is a worthwhile experience for you, the volunteer, and the people you help.

Bob Souvestre,
Master Gardener Coordinator

Fruits and Nuts

Rabbiteye Blueberry Pruning

Rabbiteye blueberries are vigorous growers that can reach 6-8 feet in a few years. Prune back to 48 inches after harvest. Plants then will have time to produce more fruiting wood before frost. Old, unproductive canes can be cut back to ground level, leaving a maximum of eight to 10 vigorous canes. Pruning generally increases berry size and earliness. Pruning dormant bushes reduces yields because fruiting wood is removed. After-harvest pruning is best!

Blackberry Disease

A serious infection of erect and trailing blackberries is rosette or double-blossom disease, caused by the fungus Cercosporella rubi. Buds on new canes are infected in the early summer, but no symptoms develop until the next spring. Numerous leafy sprouts (witches' brooms) appear from infected buds in the early spring. These shoots are stunted and pale green (later turning to bronze). Flowers are pink, and the petals are twisted. A whitish spore mass covers the pistils and stamens of the flowers. Berries do not form from infected blooms, and those from non-infected blooms on the same cane will be small and of poor quality.

Chemical control of double blossom has not been very effective. Adequate control can be obtained by pruning out the infected rosettes in the spring before they bloom. The thornless blackberry varieties Arapaho, Apache, Ouachita and Navaho have shown good resistance to rosette disease.

Pecan Pest

Pecan phylloxera causes galls on twigs and leaves of pecan trees in May and June. This insect induces leaf drop in late May and early June, dieback of twigs and loss of nut production. It makes trees look bad, but not likely to kill trees unless they are severely stressed from other problems.

A spray application of Sevin SL, Malathion, Lorsban 4E or Provado 1.6F applied when pecan buds have approximately ½ – ¾ inch of new growth usually gives good phylloxera control. A second insecticide application seven to 10 days later sometimes may be needed. Treat only those trees previously infested and those adjacent to them. Follow pesticide labels.

Weed Control

Weeds are strong competitors for nutrients and water that fruit plants need. Weed competition is especially hard on newly planted trees. Having a weed-free area 12-18 inches around a new plant will greatly increase the rate of growth and potential fruit production.

An additional advantage of keeping a weed-free zone around a fruit tree is to prevent mower blight. Mower blight is what happens when the trunk of a tree or bush is bumped with a mower or weed eater. The inner bark is frequently killed by these bumps, although no outward injury is visible. A sufficient number of bumps by mowers or weed eaters can kill a ring of inner bark around the trunk that will often result in tree death.

Weed removal by hand is effective but very time consuming. Black plastic weed barriers around the plants can be effective. A layer of organic mulch around the plant also can be very effective. Mulch should not be placed next to the trunk of the tree. The mulch can hold moisture around the trunk and encourage trunk rot. It is best to leave a couple of inches of space between the trunk of the tree and the mulch.

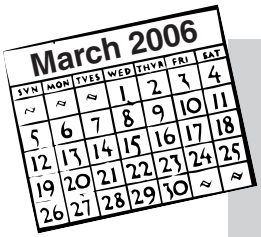
Be careful when using herbicides, because they have the potential to damage or kill fruit plants and could be hazardous to one's health if misused. Always read the label before use. Some herbicides are fairly selective in what they kill; others kill almost any plant they contact.

Many herbicides used in fruit production are not widely available to a homeowner with only a few trees, or they have to be bought in large quantities. Glyphosate, however, is a common herbicide widely available and suitable for many fruit plants.

Glyphosate is sold under several trade names. These names include Roundup, Rattler and Touchdown. These products are sold under several formulations and several container sizes. Some formulations are sold ready-to-use without any mixing.

Glyphosate is a nonselective post-emergent herbicide that will damage or kill most plants it contacts. Extreme care must be taken to avoid contact of spray with foliage, green stems or fruit of desirable crops, plants, trees or other desirable vegetation, since severe damage or death may result.

Shields or coverings made from an impermeable material may be used to prevent the spray from contacting non-target vegetation. Gray bark on trees and shrubs is normally resistant to glyposate penetration. Bark injuries or suckers may allow the spray to gain entrance into mature trees.



Fruit Tips for March

1. Complete spring application of fertilizer on fruit trees.
2. Prune trees that have not been pruned.
3. Spray fruit trees for pest and disease.
4. Graft trees. Use whip and cleft grafts in February and March. Use four-flap and bark grafts in April and May. Buds on graft wood must be tight. Keep graft wood cool until ready to use. Do not allow graft wood to freeze or dry out.

John Pyzner, Horticulturist

Turfgrass and Lawns

Turfgrass Care

Lawns now show spring re-growth. Be careful not to push the season by forcing early growth with lots of fertilizer. If put on too early, fertilizer will feed winter weeds. If put on too heavily, it will create a lush, weak growth sensitive to brown patch. Let the grass awaken gradually and show definite activity. Mow once or twice before first fertilizing.

If you wish to dethatch or power rake this year, wait until late spring when the turf is actively growing. Large dead areas are probably die-outs from winter kill or fall brown patch disease. Treat the yellow, actively diseased areas with fungicides like PCNB, iprodione, Bayleton, mancozeb, captan, thiophate, etc.

Lawn Weed Control

Herbicides can reduce weeds in your turf. Some useful materials are 2,4-D blends, Speed Zone, Image, Vantage, Simazine and Atrazine. Your county agent can advise you. Apply herbicides either before or several weeks after first green-up, but not during. Some herbicides should not be used on certain grass types (read labels well).

Broadleaf weeds often can be controlled by using selective postemergence blends that contain two or more herbicides. Formulations of 2,4-D or blends with 2,4-D are available for most southern grasses, but be extra careful using it on St. Augustine. Examples of 2,4 D blends are Green Light Wipe Out, Kmart Broadleaf Weed Killer for southern grasses, Spectrum 33 Plus, Advanced Southern Weed Killer, Trimec, Fertilome Weed Out and Weed B Gon (Southern Lawn II). Speed Zone is a four-way blend.

Most labels will stress use on younger weeds growing in the cooler mid-spring. A temporary discoloration of the lawn may occur. A second application two or three weeks later is usually needed (sometimes a third). Wet the foliage only; don't saturate the soil. Control weeds NOW, in spring! Mow herbicide-treated lawns several times before collecting clippings for compost or mulch.

Read and follow label directions! Some products contain phenoxy (2,4-D) herbicides. Avoid drift and keep spray away from gardens. Clean these sprayers thoroughly with an ammonia solution if sprayer is used on good plants. Best to buy a spray only for weed killers.

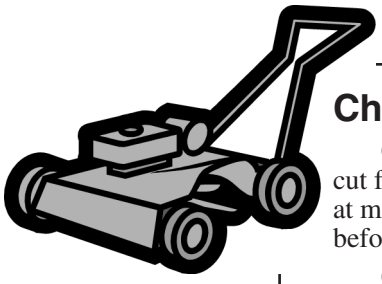
For bermuda or zoysia lawns, weed killers with MSMA or DSMA often provide good selective control for most grassy and some broadleaf weeds. Use these arsenicals in June through August. Preemergence herbicides can be applied to thin lawns to protect them from weeds until they thicken and cover. They are not for newly seeded areas or areas with growing weeds.

April Fertilizing

During April or May, all grasses should be in full swing. Start feeding your lawn. Turf fertilizers with high first number, low second number and medium last number are preferred unless a soil test shows otherwise.

Start with a complete fertilizer like 13-13-13 if you know your soil phosphorus is not high. If you have bermudagrass, use 7-8 pounds per 1,000 sq. ft. On zoysia or St. Augustine, use 6-7 pounds per 1,000 sq. ft. On centipede or carpetgrasses, use 6 pounds per 1,000 sq. ft. After this application, use just a nitrogen fertilizer at a rate of ½ to 1 pound of pure nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. every five to six weeks until late summer; then go back to the complete fertilizer.

On zoysia, and centipede lawns, apply fertilizer only one or two more times this year. Use only ½ pound of nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. each time. Carpetgrass needs very little fertilizer; once in spring is enough.



Choose Correct Mower Settings

Cutting heights are important for healthy grass. Choose the higher cut for grass in shade. Sharpen that mower blade before the season and at mid-season, too. Replace old oil with new and stale gas with fresh before you start your mower this spring.

Cut grass to these inch heights: common Bermuda, 1 ½; hybrid Bermuda, 1; zoysia, 1-1 ½; centipede/carpet, 1 (2 shade); tall fescue (North La.), 2 (spring) 3 ½ (summer); St. Augustine, 2 ½-3 (3 shade).

Tom Koske, Horticulturist

Vegetables to Plant in March

Plant snap beans, Swiss chard, collards, mustards, turnips, cabbage, broccoli and sweet corn. Transplant tomatoes, peppers and eggplants. Plant cantaloupes, squash, cucumbers and watermelons well after danger of frost is over. Black plastic will help early growth.

... and in April

Plant snap beans, butter beans, 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.

... 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), heat-tolerant tomatoes, okra, Southern peas, pumpkins, peanuts, sweet corn, watermelons, cucumbers, butter beans, squash, cantaloupe, collards and eggplants (transplants). Fruit set in the following vegetables is sensitive to high temperatures, so plant them the first part of May for best results: snap beans, butter beans, sweet corn, tomatoes (except heat-tolerant varieties) and peppers (transplants).

Crop Highlights

Sweet corn — Plant early to help reduce problems from the corn earworm. 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 to ensure good pollination and well-filled ears.

When planting sweet corn, drop two or three seeds every 8-12 inches in the row, and cover to about ½-1 inch deep. After the seeds germinate and the plants are 3-4 inches tall, thin to one plant per hill. Sidedress a 100-foot row with ¾-1 1/2 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. New high-sugar varieties have more room for error in harvesting because they are sweeter and stay sweet longer.

Recommended early-maturing varieties include Aztec or Seneca Horizon. Mid-season varieties are Funks G90 or Merit. Late-season varieties are Silver Queen (white), Gold Queen, Iochief, NK199 or Golden Cross Bantam. Three ounces of seed will plant 100 feet of row.

Try some of the super sweet (Sh2) and enhanced (EH) varieties of sweet corn. They are 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. If you eat fresh corn on the cob, try either SE or Sweet Gene7 or improved super sweets.

Corn varieties include Vision, Lancelot, Precious Gem, XX7210, How Sweet It Is (AAS), Honey- N-Pearl (AAS), Summer Sweet #8101 W, 8102 BC, Miracle, Argent, Merlin, Incredible, Bodacious, Delectable or Ambrosia.

Snap beans — Plant bush varieties about every two weeks, beginning about the time of 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, Dusky, Festina, Hialea, Lynx, Magnum, Shade, 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 they 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 F to 45 F and 90 percent to 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-American Selection winner is Kentucky Blue. The Blue Lake 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 in mid-March in south Louisiana or at the end of March in North Louisiana after the danger of frost is over. Be prepared to cover early transplanted tomatoes in case of a frost. Start spraying tomatoes after fruit set every seven to 10 days with a fungicide (Daconil or Maneb) and an insecticide (Sevin, Malathion or Thiodan).

Plant tomatoes in a well-drained site that receives plenty of direct sunlight, preferably all day, but at least seven to eight hours. 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 2 ½ gallons of warm water and stir. Commercial soluble fertilizers also are available. This will encourage a strong root system and faster growth.

Tomato vines may be determinate or indeterminate. Indeterminate types are long and spreading and continue to grow. Prune to maintain one vigorous stem.

Indeterminate varieties that grow well in Louisiana include Better Boy and Big Beef (large), Champion, Fantastic, First Lady, Carmello, Husky Gold (dwarf) AAS, Jet Star (low acid), Monte Carlo, Pink Girl (pink), Sweet Million (cherry), Sweet Chelsea (cherry), Macero II, Jolly and Terrific.

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 Carnival, Celebrity (an AAS winner), Carolina Gold, Fla. 47, Mountain Spring, Cherry Grande (cherry), Daybreak, Merced and Mountain Fresh. Also try Sanibel, Juliet, Sunbeam, Sun Master, Sunleaper, Summer Flavor 6000, Mountain Spring, and Mountain Belle (cherry).

Note: The spotted wilt virus has nearly eliminated tomato production in some areas. If you had this trouble, plant Amelia, BHN 640 or TopGun variety. These are resistant determinant types with some heat resistance.

Bell peppers and eggplants — Delay transplanting of 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 to be successful with 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 Resistant Giant No. 4, Capistrano, KRG#3, Jupiter and Purple Beauty.

Recommended hybrids are Revolution, Valencia and the large King Arthur. Bell Boy, Valencia, Enterprise, Super Heavy Weight, Blushing Beauty and the piquant Mexibell hybrids are AAS winners. For a yellow bell, try Aladdin or Summer Sweet 8610. For a mature red bell, try Wizard, Camelot (X3R), Brigadier, Aristotle or Summer Sweet 862R.

Gypsy, Cubanelle, Ivory and Aconcagua are not bell-shaped but are sweet. 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 variety Stilleto is resistant to TSWV. Try this variety if you had trouble producing bell peppers.

Recommended hybrid eggplant varieties are Blackbell, Epic, Dusky, Santana, Rossita or orientals Ichiban and Pingtung. The green eggplant varieties produce well in Louisiana and are less bitter than the purple varieties in hot, dry weather. Seed and plants are not always available, however. 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. For transplants, start in pots two to three weeks before transplanting.

Recommended cucumber varieties for slicing are Dasher II, Fanfare AAS, Diva AAS, General Lee, Turbo, Speedway, Slice Master Select, Fanfare and Sweet Success.

For pickling, try Calypso, Fauci-pak, Napoleon and Wellington.

Recommended summer squash varieties are Yellow Crook-Prelude II, Sundance, Destiny III and Medallion.

Recommended yellow straightneck are Goldbar, Liberator III, Enterprise and Patriot II.

Recommended zucchini varieties are Declaration II, Independence II, Cash Flow, Lynx, Spineless Beauty, Senator, Gold Rush (AAS), 8-Ball (AAS), Payroll, Revenue and Dividend.

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

Recommended winter squash varieties are Ultra Butternut, Butternut Supreme, Early Butternut (AAS), Tay Belle Acorn, Cream of Crop Acorn (AAS), Table King (AAS), Golden Delicious, Vegetable spaghetti, Tivoli Spaghetti (AAS), Golden Hubbard, Honey Delight Buttercup, Sweet Mama Buttercup.

Viruses are a big problem in squash production. Try some of the new virus-resistant varieties: Destiny (yellow crookneck), Liberator (yellow straight neck), Declaration and Independence (zucchini).

Recommended cantaloupe varieties are Aphrodite, Odyssey, Eclipse, Athena, Laredo, Superstar, Earlisweet, Ambrosia or Earlidew.

Recommended watermelon varieties are Charleston Gray, Jubilee, Crimson Sweet, Allsweet, Royal Sweet, Celebration, Jubilation, Star Brite, Regency, Fiesta, Desert King, Patriot, Royal Majesty, 710 Hybrid, Sangria, Mardi Gras, Royal Star, SF 800 and Stars N Stripes.

Apply 2-3 pounds of 8-24-24 or similar fertilizer per 100 feet of row before planting. Sidedress with ¾-1 pound of ammonium nitrate or 1 ½-2 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.

Try some of the icebox types like MickeyLee, Extazy, Vanessa, Sugar Baby, Yellow Doll and Baby Doll for fun. Also, Bush Jubilee and Bush Charleston Grey produce dwarf plants and nice fruit and are ideal for gardens. Some expensive new triploids worth trying are AC 5244, Cooperstown, Millennium, Revolution and Triple Crown.

Pumpkins are much like winter squash, but the flesh is often coarser and stronger. For a small size, choose Small Sugar, Trickster or Baby Bear (AAS).

Recommended medium-size pumpkins are Big Autumn, Frosty, Casper (white), Peek a Boo, Funny Face, Lumina, Howdy Doody, and Autumn Gold (AAS winner).

Recommended large or Jack-o-Lantern types are Howden, Appalachian, Spirit (AAS), Gold Rush, Big Autumn, Gold Medal, Merlin, Jumpin Jack, Aspen, ProGold 510, Sor-

cerer and Big Moon. For an extra-large pumpkin, try Atlantic Giant.

For Halloween pumpkins, plant seed in early July. Cushaws are large, long-neck pumpkins that have a meaty, finer-textured flesh. Miniature pumpkins have been bred for ornamental use. Varieties include Munchkin, Jack-B-Little, Wee-B-Little and the white Baby Boo.

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, however, so no pollination takes place. In a few days, however, 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. Sidedress cucumbers, squash, watermelons and cantaloupes with ¾-pint ammonium nitrate per 100 feet of 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, Burpee Improved or Baby Fordhook.

Plant every two weeks through mid-May to extend the harvest. One-half pound of seed will plant a 100-foot row. Plant at the rate of three or four seeds per foot of row.

Recommended pole lima beans are King of the Garden 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 (70 F or higher). 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 feet of row.

Beauregard, developed by the LSU AgCenter, is the most popular variety. It is high yielding, very attractive and tastes great.

Okra — Soil needs to be warm (65 F to 75 F) 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), Emerald, Cowhorn, Cajun Delight-AAS, Burgundy, Clemson Spineless and Gold Coast. Each of these varieties except Louisiana Green Velvet is semi-dwarf.

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 feet of row. Soil should be high in calcium.

Onions, shallots, garlic — Harvest mature onion bulbs, garlic and shallots 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 F to 50 F and 65 percent to 70 percent relative humidity.)

Irish potatoes — Begin digging 90 to 120 days after planting. Plant tops turn 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.

Fertilization

General vegetable fertilizer recommendations pertain to complete fertilizers, such as 8-24-24. Add per 100 feet of row on soils of low to medium fertility. Next year, perform a soil test.

For soils of higher fertility, reduce the rate about 25 percent to 50 percent. One pint of liquid fertilizer is equal to about 1 pound of granular fertilizer.

- 1-3 pounds:
  beans, Southern peas, okra*, English peas, sweet potatoes.
- 3-4 pounds:
  beets*, cantaloupe*, watermelon*, carrots*, radishes, turnips*, lettuce*, onions*, garlic*, shallots*, mustard*, spinach, hot peppers*, squash*, cucumbers.*
- 5-6 pounds:
  cabbage*, broccoli*, brussels sprouts*, sweet peppers*, collards*, cauliflower*, tomatoes*, Irish potatoes*, eggplant*, corn.*

*Requires at least one sidedressing of about ¾ pound (about 1 ½ cups) of ammonium nitrate per 100 feet of row or per 300 sq. ft. Additional sidedressings will help to obtain high yields (especially corn and tomatoes).

Note: An 8-24-24 or 7-21-21 is usually a better fertilizer than 8-8-8 for most vegetable crops because of the low ratio of nitrogen to phosphorus and potassium. One of these should be available in your area. If 8-24-24 and 7-21-21 are not available, don't hesitate to use 8-8-8, 13-13-13 or other complete fertilizer.

Tom Koske and Jimmy Boudreaux, Horticulturists

Checklist for March, April, May

1. Plant warm-season bedding plants beginning in mid-March 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 have finished flowering, wait until the foliage turns 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.
4. Divide and transplant older, large clumps of chrysanthemums in early March. Failure to divide plants can result in weak, spindly growth with few flowers.
5. Coleus are great annual bedding plants for Louisiana's landscapes. Try some of the newer sun-loving varieties.
6. Fertilize shrubs in 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 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. Garden centers will have many crape myrtles in 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.

Spring Cleaning Aquatic Gardens

Aquatic features, such as fountains, decorative ponds and aquatic gardens, have almost become a standard feature in Louisiana landscapes. If there is a thick layer of gunk on the bottom of the material lining your pond or aquatic garden, it is a good idea to clean it out by early March. Generally, you should clean out smaller aquatic gardens about once a year and larger ponds every few years. It is best to get this done while the weather is cool, the plants are relatively dormant and the fish are less active.

The first step in cleaning out the pond is to remove all of the fish and plants. Put fish, submerged plants and floating plants in separate buckets or tubs filled with water from the pond. Next, pump out the water from the pond. As the water gets low, catch any fish you missed. When the water is pumped out, remove the layer of sediment from the bottom. Then, lightly scrub the bottom and sides of the pond with a brush – do not use cleaners or soap. Rinse and pump out the rinse water. Next, add new water until the pond is almost full. Save room to pour the water you have placed the plants and fish in back into the pond. It is full of beneficial microorganisms. You must add dechlorinator to the water before you replace the fish and plants if you use water from a municipal source. Do not forget to do this, since chlorine in the water can be toxic to the fish.

Next, put the submerged plants (such as elodea) and floating aquatic plants (such as duckweed) and the water they were stored in back into the pond. Trim, divide and repot containerized water and bog plants as needed (except Louisiana irises and calla lilies, which are actively growing), and place them back into the pond.

Finally, put fish in plastic bags filled with water from the bucket or tub they were held in, seal them shut (with a zipper or wire twist) and float the bags in the pond for about 15 minutes or until the water in the bag and the water in the pond are the same temperature, then release the fish.

Even if you decide not to clean out your pond and divide plant this month, at least trim off all dead, brown, freeze-damaged leaves and stems from floating and containerized aquatic plants. That way, the healthy new growth does not get mixed into the old, unattractive foliage.

Many kids love to help with cleaning out the pond (remember how you loved to play in mud and water?), so think about getting them involved. Put in some work in spring and enjoy a beautiful, healthy aquatic garden this summer.

Louisiana Irises

Blooming from late March to early May, the Louisiana iris is a floral ambassador that has carried our state's name all over the world. Louisiana iris is the name used worldwide for a unique group of native Louisiana iris species and their hybrids. Their extraordinary beauty and reliability in the garden have made them increasingly popular, but they still deserve more recognition and use here in their home territory.

Though a number of iris species are native to Louisiana, only five species – *Iris brevicaulis, Iris fulva, Iris giganticaerulea, Iris hexagona and Iris nelsonii* – are known as "The Louisianans." Only in south Louisiana do all five species occur together. They are closely related and will interbreed with each other but with no other species. The interbreeding, or crossing, of these species has resulted in the modern hybrid cultivars we grow today. Their large attractive flowers cover a broad range of colors, including many shades of blue, purple, red, yellow, pink, gold, brown, lavender, burgundy and white.

The best time to plant Louisiana irises is in August and September when they are dormant, but you can buy and plant them in spring while they are in bloom with good success as well. 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 after planting (established Louisiana irises do not need staking).

Louisiana irises should be grown with as much direct sun as possible. Although they will tolerate shade for part of the day, at least about six hours of direct sun are needed for good blooming. You can plant Louisiana irises in beds by themselves, combine them with other perennials or even place them in aquatic gardens.

When preparing a spot to plant them, 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. The foliage tends to stay more attractive in the summer. Simply place a potted iris in 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 on the edges of large 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. Next fall, in October or November, fertilize the irises as they begin their winter growing season.

Ground Covers for Louisiana Landscapes

The term ground cover is applied to low-growing plants (other than turf grass) used to cover areas of the landscape. Perennial, evergreen plants having a sprawling, or spreading habit are most often used. The plants used for ground covers are generally less than12 inches high, but taller growing plants are also used appropriately in certain landscapes on 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. You should also look at the size of the area to be planted. Only the most reliable, fast-spreading and reasonably priced ground covers should be considered for large areas.

Monkey grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus*), creeping lily turf (*Liriope spicata*) and Japanese ardisia (*Ardisia japonica*) are good choices for shade to part-shade. Asiatic jasmine (*Trachelospermum asiaticum*) and liriope (*Liriope muscari*) are excellent for sun to part-shade.

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

Shade to part-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.

Sun to part-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*), perennial verbenas and yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*).

Rose Pest Problems

Get roses off to a great start by starting a regular spray program in early April for black spot control. You cannot wait to see the symptoms of this potentially destructive disease to control it. Only a regular, preventive program of spraying will do the job.

Black spot is the most common disease of roses in Louisiana and causes nearly circular black spots with frayed or fringed margins. Infected leaves turn yellow and fall off, leaving the bush denuded and weakened. Most hybrid teas and grandiflora roses are particularly susceptible, but roses in any group, including old garden roses, can have problems with this disease.

Weekly applications should be made from April through November for best control. If this seems too much trouble, get rid of cultivars that have constant problems with black spot, and choose those that have more natural resistance to the disease.

Products for controlling black spot (and other rose diseases) include captan, mancozeb (Manzate), triforine (Funginex), chlorothalonil (Daconil), thiophanate methyl (Fertilome Halt) and thiophanate methyl plus mancozeb.

A few insects cause problems in spring, most notably aphids and thrips. Aphids cluster on the buds and new growth, sucking out the sap of the plant. This attack can cause buds to abort and new growth to be distorted or deformed.

Aphids are easily controlled with any common insecticide labeled for use on roses. Spray as needed, since they often return when the original population is killed off (do not spray if natural predators, such as ladybugs, are present and controlling the population).

Thrips are tiny insects that bore into the flower buds and feed on the petals. Infested flowers will not open properly, or they will open but have brown or tan edges to the petals. It's heartbreaking to see your spring and early summer flowers ruined. Systemic insecticides, such as acephate (Orthene, Isotox) or dimethoate (Cygon), applied weekly, will prevent this problem.

Dan Gill and Allen Owings,
Horticulturists

2006 Home Grounds Survey

The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, the educational branch of the LSU AgCenter, maintains a home-grounds program to provide information and recommendations on home grounds care to clientele. Home grounds care includes pruning, fertilization, pest control, planting procedures, varieties and other recommendations relating to trees, shrubs, vines, ground covers, annual bedding plants, herbaceous flowering perennials and lawns.

The purpose of this survey is to obtain feedback on the effectiveness of our home grounds base program. It will help local county agents provide the information you desire in future issues of Horticulture Hints. We thank you for your willingness to participate!

Your Parish: _____

If you maintained home grounds (lawn, woody ornamentals, bedding plants, trees, etc.) over the last two to three years, please complete this survey and return to the attention of Dan Gill at the address at the end of the survey. If you did not maintain home grounds over the last several years, check here ( ) and return the survey unanswered.

1. How helpful was each of the following sources of information in helping you maintain home grounds over the last several years?

	Very Helpful	Fairly Helpful	Not Helpful
Newspaper	☐	☐	☐
Magazines	☐	☐	☐
TV/radio	☐	☐	☐
Friends/relatives	☐	☐	☐
Extension service publications	☐	☐	☐
Your county agent	☐	☐	☐
Horticulture Hints	☐	☐	☐
Garden centers	☐	☐	☐
Master Gardeners	☐	☐	☐
Internet	☐	☐	☐

2. Since you started home grounds maintenance, indicate the extent to which you have used the following Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service recommendations.

	Often	Sometimes	Never
Pest control recommendations	☐	☐	☐
Plant selection recommendations	☐	☐	☐
Planting technique recommendations	☐	☐	☐
Fertilizer recommendations	☐	☐	☐
Time of planting recommendations	☐	☐	☐

3. How much do you estimate you spend annually in the area of home grounds maintenance and similar practices? (This includes lawn maintenance, plant purchases, fertilizer, etc.)

4. What is the size of the home grounds area you regularly maintain?
(Include lawn area, ornamental area, etc.; don't include vegetable area, fruit trees.)

Acreage _____ or square feet _____

5. How pleased were you last year in the performance of your home grounds plantings? (circle one)

Above average Average Below average

6. When and how much do you work in your home grounds?

	Much	Some	Little/None
Spring	☐	☐	☐
Summer	☐	☐	☐
Fall	☐	☐	☐
Winter	☐	☐	☐

7. Age of the primary person who does home grounds maintenance in your household.

8. The primary maintenance person(s) (circle one): Male Female Both

9. Where you live is mostly (circle one): Rural Suburban City

10. During the past four years, to what extent would you say you have participated in extension education programs (meetings, workshops, clinics, etc.) on home grounds (circle one)?

A great deal Pretty much Somewhat Not much

11. If you were to take all the practices we have talked about in home grounds, would you say you were influenced to follow these practices as a result of extension programs or other information?

12. In your opinion, the amount of time and effort that the extension service spends on home grounds educational programs is (circle one):

Not enough About right Too much

13. In your opinion, what does the extension service need to do to improve its home grounds educational programs?

Have more field days Write more publications Have more home grounds meetings

Other (list): _____

_____

_____

14. Any other specific comments regarding the extension service and its home grounds educational programs?

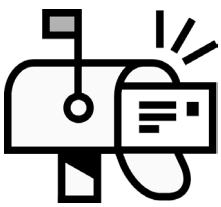
_____

_____

_____

_____

_____



Please return completed survey to:
Dan Gill
Department of Horticulture
P. O. Box 25100
Baton Rouge, LA 70894-5100

Take Advantage of Educational Opportunities

Many gardening organizations, public gardens and the LSU AgCenter have garden-related educational programs, classes, demonstrations, shows, plant sales, garden tours and a variety of other events during the next three 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 will be able to find unique plants that may not be readily available from other sources at plant sales. And, also important is the chance to meet other gardeners, talk gardening and get new inspiration for working in your garden. Take some time out from the busy spring to participate in these events. You'll be glad you did.

Please contact your parish agent for additional information.

Enter contact information here.

Visit our Web site: www.lsuagcenter.com

LSU AgCenter Research & Extension

Department of Horticulture
155 J. C. Miller Hall - LSU
Post Office Box 25100
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70894-5100

Horticulture Hints

Spring 2006

LSU AgCenter
Research & Extension

Visit our Web site:
www.lsuagcenter.com

Prepared quarterly by:

Jimmy Boudreaux, Ph.D., Vegetables/Citrus
Dan Gill, Consumer Horticulture
Tom Koske, Ph.D., Lawns and Vegetables
Allen Owings, Ph.D., Ornamentals
John Pyzner, Ph.D., Fruits and Nuts
Bob Souvestre, Master Gardener Program

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

Tom Koske, Horticulture Specialist