

Horticulture Hints



Spring
2013

Vegetable Gardening

Vegetables to Plant in March

Direct plant snap bean, Swiss chard, radish, lettuce, collard, mustard, turnip, cabbage, broccoli and sweet corn seeds. Plant tomato, pepper and eggplant transplants. Plant cantaloupes, squash, cucumbers and watermelons well after danger of frost is over; this usually is after March 15 in south Louisiana and closer to April 1 in north Louisiana.

... and in April

Plant snap beans, butter beans, radishes, collards, cucumbers, eggplants, cantaloupes, okra, Southern peas (field peas), peanuts, pumpkins, winter squash, summer squash, sweet corn, sweet potatoes (late April), tomatoes (transplants), peppers (transplants) and watermelons.

... and in May

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

Now Is Time to Think About Spring Vegetable Garden

Are you ready to garden? Read this article to make sure you are prepared for planting before it's too late.

Most spring vegetables can be planted just after the danger of the last freeze of the season has passed – generally mid-March for south Louisiana and early April for north Louisiana. Prepare your soil in January and February, making sure to work the soil deep and add all amendments needed (according to your soil test) for optimum plant growth and production. Soil samples can be sent to the LSU AgCenter's soil testing lab on the LSU campus in Baton Rouge (www.stpal.lsu.edu).

Start your tomato, pepper and eggplant transplants eight to 10 weeks prior to when you will place them in the ground. Cucumber, squash and melon transplants should not be seeded for transplants earlier than four weeks prior to planting them into the garden. Or just direct seed these crops. Everything else can be directly seeded into the ground. See the planting guidelines and suggestions for dates to plant particular crops.

Crop Highlights

Sweet corn. Planting corn early helps reduce 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 to 1½ pounds of calcium nitrate when the plants are about 12 inches high and again when the plants are 24-36 inches high. If you are unable to obtain ammonium nitrate, apply calcium nitrate at a rate of 1½ to 3 pounds per 100 feet of row. One pint of fertilizer or 2 cups is about 1 pound.

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

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

The recommended regular early maturing sweet corn 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 because they lose some of their sweetness when pollinated by these other types of corn. The super sweets don't germinate well in cool soils, so wait until soil has warmed considerably before planting.

Many new high-sugar modern varieties are commonly available. The best include the early varieties Platinum Lady, White Out, Xtra-Tender 372, Temptation, Sweet Ice, Bodacious, Sweet Riser, Dazzle, Lancelot and Precious Gem; midseason varieties 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 Rhythm; and late or long season varieties 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 snap beans for Louisiana are Ambra, Bronco, Contender, Pod Squad, Valentino, Dusky, Festina, Hialeah, Magnum, Storm, Strike, Provider and Bush Blue Lake 274. An All-America Selections winner is Derby. Try Roma II for a good-eating, flat, Italian pod bean. For a purple pod bush snap, try Royal Burgundy in early spring. Those who prefer the yellow wax beans should choose Golden Rod Wax, Goldmine or Golden Improved.

One-half pound of snap bean seed will plant a 100 foot row. Plant seeds 1-2 inches apart in the row.

High temperatures at bloom may cause many of the flowers to fall off. Generally, snap beans don't produce well when planted in late May. For best quality, harvest pods before the developing seeds cause the pod to bulge. Beans can be held for up to seven days at 40-45 degrees 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 Selections 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. Plant tomatoes in a well-drained site that receives six to eight hours of direct sunlight each day. When tomatoes receive too little sunlight, few blossoms form and many that do form will fall off before setting fruit. 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 plants! To avoid severe damage from diseases and insects, spray tomatoes after fruit set every seven to 10 days with a fungicide (Daconil or Maneb). Scout weekly for insects.

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

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

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

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

Recommended determinate types for Louisiana include Celebrity (an All-America Selections winner, best taste), Carolina Gold, Florida 91, Mountain Spring, Cherry Grande



(cherry), Floralina. Also try Sun Master, Sunleaper, Summer Flavor 6000, Mountain Spring and Phoenix.

Note: The tomato 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 18 inches and eggplants 18-36 inches apart.

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

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

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

Recommended hybrid eggplant varieties are Fairy Tale, 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 cucurbits outdoors well after the danger of frost is over. Do not keep transplants in pots longer than three to four weeks prior to planting in your garden.

Recommended cucumber varieties for slicing are Talladega, Dasher II, Olympian, 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 squash varieties 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 squash 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 crookneck); 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, and Starbrite. 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 fruit from each plant when they reach 4-5 inches in diameter.

Pumpkins are much like winter squash, but the flesh often is coarser and stronger. 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 the 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 that time, so no pollination takes place. In a few days, though, the male flowers appear, and normal fruit set begins. In summer, the process reverses – with the male flowers usually developing first and the females later.

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

Use pesticides on cucurbits late in the afternoon so as not to reduce the bee population. Side-dress cucumbers, squash, watermelons and cantaloupes with $\frac{3}{4}$ pound of ammonium nitrate per 100 foot row or $1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds of calcium nitrate as vines begin to run. Weekly applications of a general purpose fungicide (Daconil or Maneb) starting at first bloom will protect the foliage and improve yield. Plastic mulch will reduce fruit rot and enhance the production of cantaloupes and the other cucurbits.

Lima beans (butter beans).

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

Plant lima beans every two weeks through mid-May to extend the harvest. One-half pound of 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, another LSU AgCenter variety, requires a sandy soil.



Okra. Soil needs to be warm (65-75 degrees) for okra seeds to germinate. Soak seeds 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, 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 sized seeds, and Virginia types have the largest. Fertilize lightly with 1-2 pounds of 8-24-24 or similar fertilizer per 100 foot row. Soil should be high in calcium.

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

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

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

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

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



Don't guess. Soil test!

Want to grow beautiful flowers, delicious vegetables or other plants? Learn the right combination of fertilizer, sulfur, lime or other ingredients for your soil.

The LSU AgCenter Soil Testing Lab is the only lab that makes fertilizer recommendations based on Louisiana-specific research.

LSU AgCenter
Research & Extension

Soil Testing & Plant Analysis Laboratory

For more info, visit: LSUAgCenter.com/SoilTest or call 225-578-2110



LouEASYana GARDENING

Easy Gardening starts with healthy soil. Most of us go to the doctor regularly for checkups to make sure we are healthy. Why not do a "checkup" on your soil?

The average home gardener should take soil samples from turf, garden and landscape beds about every three years. Soil tests are especially useful in determining what type of fertilizer to use or if your soil needs lime. Get your soil tested, and you'll find that keeping your soil healthy will make gardening a lot easier!

For more information on soil testing, or to pick up a soil testing box with everything you need to submit a sample, contact the nearest LSU AgCenter Extension office. (There's one in every parish.)

It's not hard to take and submit a soil test. Here are the basic steps:

1. Choose an area where you want to test the soil, such as a vegetable garden, front lawn or flower bed.
2. Sample the soil to a depth of 2-3 inches for turf and 6 inches for cultivated beds.
3. Take soil from at least 10 places in the selected area to obtain a representative sample.
4. Combine the soil taken from those various places and mix thoroughly.
5. Place one pint of soil in the sealable bag from the soil testing box. Label the bag and put it in the box.
6. Fill out the soil testing request form. Then place it in the addressed and postage paid box along with the sealed bag of soil and a check to cover fees and shipping.

*Dan Gill, Consumer Horticulturist
and Kathryn Fontenot, Community/
School Vegetable Gardens*

Become a Louisiana Master Gardener Volunteer

The LSU AgCenter offers home gardeners opportunities to develop their skills and share their knowledge as gardening educators for the public through participation in the Louisiana Master Gardener Volunteer Program.

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. Training for the Louisiana Master Gardener Program is tailored to include instruction for both beginners and experienced level gardeners.

Master Gardener certification training classes are offered in 24 parishes across the state and are planned, organized and conducted by LSU AgCenter Extension Service educators. Classes offer an average of 50 hours of instruction on a variety of interesting horticulture subjects. Master Gardener participants learn about insects, diseases, weeds, ornamental plants, lawn care, fruits, vegetables, soil fertility, how to diagnose plant problems and much more.

In exchange for horticulture training, Master Gardeners contribute time as volunteers, working through their parish LSU AgCenter Extension Service offices to develop and enhance community programs related to horticulture.

As gardening educators of the LSU AgCenter, Master Gardener volunteers help both youth and adults

gain appropriate gardening knowledge through various service related programs and activities. Depending on the community needs, these may include garden shows, gardening workshops, answering horticulture phone calls at the parish Extension office, garden tours, developing educational materials and newsletters, demonstration gardens, plant health clinics, presentations to garden clubs, and community and school gardening programs.

More than ever, home gardeners are becoming active Master Gardeners and joining as partners with the LSU AgCenter to meet the growing public interest for gardening education. Among the volunteers who become certified Louisiana Master Gardeners are teachers, business owners, college students, parents, retirees and professionals from all walks of life, culturally and experientially. As Master Gardener volunteers, they bring an excitement and energy to helping meet the educational needs of home gardeners in Louisiana.

Experience the satisfaction of becoming a Louisiana Master Gardener volunteer by contacting your parish LSU AgCenter Extension Service office or visiting www.LSUAgCenter.com/mastergardener for more information about the Louisiana Master Gardener Program.



Take Advantage of Educational Opportunities

Many gardening organizations and public gardens – and certainly the LSU AgCenter – have garden-related educational programs, classes, demonstrations, shows, plants 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 or at other plant sales. It's also important to have 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!



LSU AgCenter Sponsored Garden Shows

March 9, 2013

Spring Garden Day, Hammond, La.,
Contact: Sandra Benjamin at sbenjamin@agcenter.lsu.edu

March 9-10, 2013

Baton Rouge Spring Garden Show, Baton Rouge, La.
Contact: David Himelrick at dhimelrick@agcenter.lsu.edu

March 15-16, 2013

Northshore Garden Show, Covington, La.
Contact: Rusty Batty at rbatty@agcenter.lsu.edu

March 23-23, 2013

Southwest Louisiana Garden Festival, Lake Charles, La.
Contact: Robert Turley at rturley@agcenter.lsu.edu

April 6-7, 2013

New Orleans Spring Garden Show, New Orleans, La.
Contact: Andrew Loyd at aloyd@agcenter.lsu.edu

May 4, 2013

TARC Garden and Market Festival
Houma, LA

Landscape Gardening and Ornamentals

La. Super Plants Named for Spring 2013

The Louisiana Super Plant program is an educational and marketing campaign of the LSU AgCenter that highlights tough and beautiful plants that perform well in Louisiana landscapes. The latest selections – for spring 2013 – are being announced.

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

Plants should be available at participating area nurseries by the time promotion begins. To see a list of participating nurseries in your area, go to the Louisiana Super Plants website at www.lsuagcenter.com/superplants

Little Ruby Alternanthera (promoted early in April)

- Warm-season bedding plant
- Full to partial sun
- Grows 12 inches tall by 14-16 inches wide
- Space 12 inches apart
- Plant after danger of frost through midsummer
- Grown for beautiful foliage in shades of burgundy/purple
- Excellent compact growth habit
- Consistently attractive through entire season
- Heat tolerant; low moisture requirements
- Great in containers and along front of beds

Bandana Lantana (promoted second and third weeks of April)

- Warm-season bedding plant
- Full sun
- Grows 20-24 inches tall by 24 inches wide
- Space 15 inches apart
- Plant after danger of frost through midsummer
- Compact, mounding habit without the lankiness of traditional lantana
- Very large flowers, with unique and brilliant flower colors
- Blooms summer thru fall
- Heat, humidity and drought tolerant
- Attracts butterflies and hummingbirds
- Deer resistant
- Ideal to use in containers or in beds



University tested and industry approved

Superior performance
under Louisiana growing conditions

Ask for **Louisiana Super Plants**
where you shop

New Louisiana Super Plants for Spring
'Little Ruby' Alternanthera
Bandana Lantanas
'Aphrodite' Althea

Look for more Louisiana Super Plants
announced each spring and fall



For more information on
Louisiana Super Plants, visit our website:
LSUAgCenter.com/SuperPlants

Aphrodite Althea (promoted early in May)

- Summer-flowering shrub to small tree
- Full sun to partial shade
- Grows 8-10 feet tall by 6 feet wide
- Deciduous
- Very large, rosy-red, single ruffled blooms with magenta throats
- Long blooming season – from late spring through midsummer
- More upright and compact bushy habit than other altheas
- Sterile, does not set seed
- Well suited as an informal hedge (spaced about 4 feet apart) or accent plant.

Understanding Hardiness Zones and Heat Zones

Choosing hardy plants that can reliably survive winter cold is important to successful gardening. In our climate, plants must also be able to thrive in, or at least tolerate, our long, hot summers.

To help with this, a Hardiness Zone Map has been developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the map shows divisions of the country into zones based on average minimum winter temperatures. The American Horticulture Society has addressed the issue of heat tolerance by developing a Plant Heat-Zone Map.

The state of Louisiana includes just two hardiness zones, Zone 8 and Zone 9. The average minimum temperature in Zone 8 is 10 to 20 degrees F and in Zone 9 is 20 to 30 degrees F. You can look at a Hardiness Zone Map online to see what zone you garden in. But you can also simply be aware of your typical winter weather and do a pretty good job of deciding for yourself.

Basically, if winter temperatures where you garden typically drop into the teens every winter, and these temperatures are considered to be common and expected, then you garden in Zone 8. If temperatures in the teens typically do not occur during winter where you garden, and when they do they are considered exceptional rather than typical, you garden in Zone 9.

You will often see the hardiness zones listed after a plant name in catalogs, books and magazines, such as *Hydrangea* 'Penny Mac' (*Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Penny Mac') Zones 5-9. That means this shrub is hardy enough to grow as far north as Zone 5 but doesn't perform well south of Zone 9.

You might think that as long as the plants you choose are hardy where you garden, that would be enough. But extreme summer heat has a significant effect on how plants grow. Knowing a plant is hardy enough to survive our winters does not mean it's tough enough to survive our intensely hot summers.

In the American Horticulture Society's Plant Heat-Zone Map, the

zones are based on the average number of days per year the temperature reaches 86 degrees F or higher. Louisiana is mostly Heat Zone 9 (120 to 150 days), with some smaller areas in Zone 8 (91 to 120 days).

Because the heat zones have not been around as long as the hardiness zones, and perhaps because much of the country obsesses more over hardiness than heat, the heat zones still are not as widely used in plant descriptions as they should be.

If you ever wondered what those funny zone numbers were all about, I hope I've helped clear things up a bit. Don't let the zones get you too confused. They are especially helpful when unfamiliar plants are considered for use.



Colorful Foliage Plants for Summer

We normally just think of foliage as green, but a number of ornamental plants are grown for their colorful foliage. Many of our best and most reliable plants for summer color rely on foliage rather than flowers to provide the color we all crave in our landscapes.

All of these plants will thrive in the heat and humidity of the coming summer, and you will find many more available at your local nursery.

Caladiums (*Caladium x hortulanum*)

One of the best known and popular plants with colorful foliage is the caladium. The foliage colors are attractive combinations of green, white, pink, rose, red and chartreuse. Plant in April or May after the weather is warm and settled where you garden. Although commonly grown in partial shade to shade, the LSU AgCenter's Hammond Research Station has done trials to see when cultivars are best for sunny spots. Best choices are 'Fire Chief,' 'Red Frill,' 'White Pearl,' 'White Queen' and 'Moonlight.'

Coleus (*Solenostemon scutellarioides*)

The number of coleus cultivars available these days is amazing. Some coleus cultivars do best in partial shade, such as the Wizard series and the Kong series. But most coleus cultivars available at the nursery thrive in full sun as well as partial shade.

Alternanthera (*Alternanthera*)

There are new cultivars of this plant showing up every year. They may be grown in sun or partial shade. Foliage colors generally are red, yellow, pink or white, often combined with green. Short cultivars include 'Little Ruby' (a Louisiana Super Plants selection), 'Red Threads,' 'Summer Flame' and 'Nana Aurea.' Taller cultivars are 'Purple Knight,' 'Gail's Choice' and 'Party Time.' Bloodleaf or chicken gizzard plant (*Iresine herb-stii*) is similar to the taller growing alternantheras and is also a valuable plant with colorful leaves for summer color.

Copper Plant (*Acalypha*)

Copper plant is a tall, shrubby plant that thrives in full to partial sun, and it may persist if winters are mild. The foliage shows shades of chocolate, reddish-orange, red, green, pink, yellow or chartreuse, and the leaves may be fringed or crinkled depending on the cultivar. This tough plant grows 3 to 5 feet tall and will perform all summer with little care.

More Choices

Also recommended: ornamental sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*); duranta (*Duranta erecta*) 'Cuban Gold' and 'Golden Edge'; fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum*) 'Rubrum,' 'Fireworks,' 'Sky Rocket' and 'Cherry Sparkler'; Persian shield (*Strobilanthes dyerianus*); perilla (*Perilla frutescens* var. *crispa*); variegated shell ginger (*Alpinia zerumbet*); canna (*Canna generalis*) 'Bengal Tiger,' 'Phasion' and 'Tropicana'; variegated cassava (*Manihot esculenta*); and *Tradescantia pallida* 'Purple Heart' and 'Blue Sue.'

Caladiums

Caladiums are easy enough for the casual gardener to expect routine success, and their elegant beauty also makes them a staple in the most accomplished gardener's landscape.

Native to tropical South America, caladiums thrive in the heat and humidity of our long summers. They are remarkably free from major insect or disease problems.

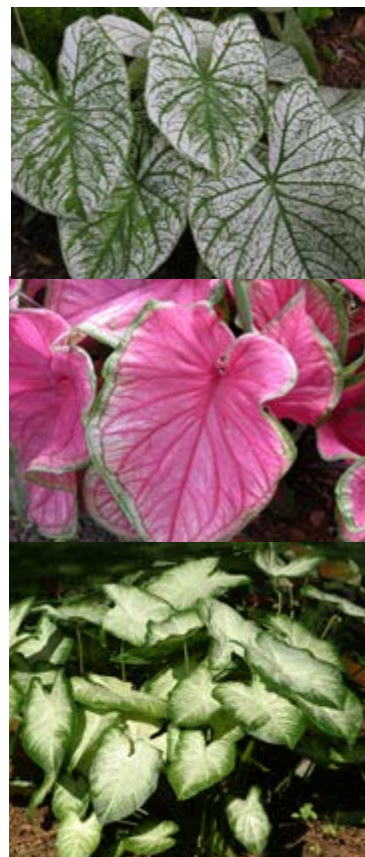
Caladiums make outstanding additions to shady summer gardens. They thrive in beds with two to four hours of morning sun or dappled light through the day. All caladium cultivars thrive in these conditions and produce the largest plants with the lushest growth.

Some cultivars are more tolerant of sunny conditions, however, and are successful in beds receiving part to full sun. When planting caladiums into sunny beds, it is better to plant tubers rather than growing plants. That way the growth that emerges from the tubers into sunny conditions adapts to the sun. Caladium plants you purchase have been grown in shady conditions, and the foliage will burn badly when planted into full sun – although subsequent foliage produced will be sun adapted and will hold up.

When grown in full sun, caladiums will need more water and fertilizer to do their best. In addition, caladium cultivars growing in full sun are shorter and more compact, produce more leaves, produce slightly smaller leaves and have more intense coloration than when grown in the shade.

According to recently completed research trials at the LSU AgCenter's Hammond Research Station, the caladiums that do best in full sun include cultivars in the following categories:

- Fancy-leaf red: Fire Chief
- Fancy-leaf pink: Carolyn Whorton, Elise
- Fancy-leaf white: Moonlight, Garden White
- Fancy-leaf multicolor: Tapestry
- Lance-leaf red: Red Ruffles
- Lance-leaf pink: Florida Sweetheart
- Lance-leaf white: Mount Everest, White Delight, White Dynasty, White Ruffles
- Lance-leaf multicolor: Candyland, Raspberry Moon





Checklist for March, April and May

1. Plant warm-season bedding plants beginning in mid-March (south Louisiana) or mid-April (north Louisiana) and continuing through May. For best results, plant petunias by mid-March and wait to plant periwinkles (vinca) until late April.
2. Even after spring bulbs that will reliably return each year have finished flowering, wait until the foliage turns mostly yellow before cutting it off. Food is being manufactured and stored for next year's blooms.
3. Mulch plants to reduce watering requirements, suppress weed growth and minimize soil temperature changes. Excellent mulches are pine straw, chopped leaves and pine bark. Mulch should be applied 2 inches thick for effective weed suppression.
4. Divide and transplant older, larger clumps of chrysanthemums in early March. Failure to divide plants can result in weak, spindly growth with few flowers.
5. Coleus are great annual bedding plants 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 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.
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 Horticulturist

Lawns

Lawn Weed Control

Herbicides can be effective tools for reducing weeds in your yard, but the best way to manage weeds is to grow a thick healthy lawn. Lawns that are managed properly are lush and healthy, with few weed problems. Visit www.lsuagcenter.com and type in keywords "lawn bmp" for more information on growing a beautiful lawn.

Pre-emergence herbicides – Weed preventer or pre-emergence herbicides can be helpful in preventing the emergence of several annual grasses and broadleaves. Pre-emergence herbicides may be applied safely in late winter to early spring to all established southern lawns. Most pre-emergence products for home gardeners are granular and should be applied with drop or broadcast spreaders and "watered in" soon after application.

Pre-emergence herbicides kill weeds as they germinate, so timing is everything with these types of chemicals. There is limited opportunity for application, since you have to apply before weeds germinate. Residents in the New Orleans area and other extreme southern areas of the state should apply pre-emergence herbicides in late January or early February (definitely before Valentine's Day). Alexandria to Baton Rouge residents should apply just after Feb. 14. If you live in north Louisiana, try to get these herbicides applied in late February to early March.

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

Post-emergence Herbicides - Post-emergence herbicides are used to kill weeds that already have emerged in the lawn. Winter broadleaf weeds usually are prevalent in the late winter to early spring throughout the state. These broadleaf weeds often can be controlled by using selective liquid post-emergence "trimec-type" herbicides that contain formulations with three weed killing ingredients – 2,4-D; dicamba and mecoprop.

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

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

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

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

What about weed and feed products? Weed and feed herbicides can be used at the 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.

*Ron Strahan
Weed Scientist/Turfgrass Specialist*

Plant problems? We can help!



The LSU AgCenter's Plant Diagnostic Center is a one-stop shop for all your plant health problems. The center provides rapid, accurate diagnosis of the cause of a

problem and delivers recommendations for best management practices and long-term care.



**Plant
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Center**

For more info, visit: LSUAgCenter.com/PlantDiagnostics
or call 225-578-4562

Pruning and Training Peaches

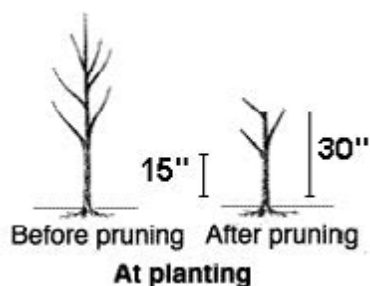
Growing peaches and nectarines in the landscape or backyard orchard in Louisiana can be both challenging and rewarding. The success of your peach-growing enterprise will depend largely on the care and attention the trees are given throughout their lifetimes. Pruning and training are an essential part of that care.



Peaches usually are trained to an open-center system and should eventually be shaped like the tree shown below in aerial and side views.

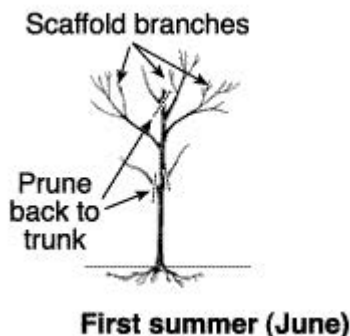
Initial Pruning and Training

Cut back newly planted trees to about 30 inches high, just above a lateral branch or bud. If the tree is branched when it comes from the nursery, select three or four laterals with wide-angle crotches (greater than 45 degrees) that are spaced evenly up and around the trunk for the permanent scaffold limbs.



lowest limb should be about 15 inches and the highest about 30 inches from the ground. If no desirable laterals are available, head the tree to the desired height and cut out all side branches to one bud.

A number of shoots that can be selected for scaffold limbs will develop during the season. Select scaffold limbs during the summer or wait until just before growth begins in the second season.



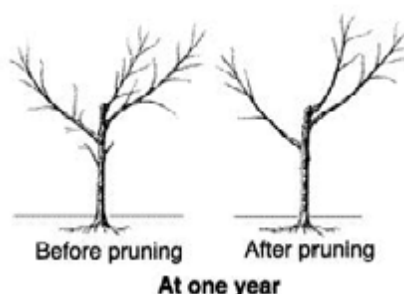
First Growing Season

At the end of the first growing season, the tree should look similar to the "before pruning" example below. Prune in mid-February to early March.

For that pruning, first, remove diseased, broken and low-hanging limbs. Next, remove vigorous upright shoots that may have developed on the inside of the main scaffolds to develop an open-center (vase-shaped) tree.

Once the scaffold system of the young peach tree is established, prune as little as possible until the tree becomes mature enough to fruit, usually the third or fourth year.

Peaches are produced on wood that grew during the previous season. Do not prune trees from October to January. Pruning in late winter reduces the chance of winter injury and infection by the bacterial canker organism.



Pruning Older Trees

To prune older trees, follow the same principles used after the first growing. First, remove low-hanging, broken, and/or diseased limbs. To maintain the open center, remove any vigorous upright shoots developing on the inside of the tree, leaving the smaller shoots for fruit production. Then prune out poor-quality fruiting wood, such as shoots less than pencil size in diameter or branches that hang downward and are shaded. The desir-

able wood left for production should be about the diameter of a pencil and from 12 to 18 inches in length. If the length exceeds 24 inches, cut off about one-third of this fruiting branch. Finally, prune the vigorous upright limbs on the scaffolds by cutting them back to an outside-growing shoot.

The same principles used to develop the tree are used annually to maintain the size and shape of the mature peach tree. Remove low-hanging, broken and dead limbs first. Next, remove the vigorous upright shoots along the scaffolds. Lower the tree to the desired height by pruning the scaffolds down to an outside-growing shoot at the desired height.

Prune out extremely vigorous shoots developing on the inside of the tree because they shade out the center. Leave the small shoots alone. Do this in early or mid-July. Never prune a bearing peach tree heavily enough to make eventual thinning of the fruit unnecessary. Such heavy pruning drastically reduces the crop as well as the size of the tree.

Lightly head back terminal growth on the scaffold limbs to outward-growing laterals to maintain the open center or bowl-shaped tree. The objective is to open up the tree to allow sunlight penetration and air movement and to improve spray coverage. When the tree is well grown, pruning consists mainly of moderate thinning and heading cuts back to outward-growing laterals to keep the tree low and spreading. A height of 8 to 9 feet is preferred.

Thinning Fruit

A peach tree cultivated under favorable conditions will set more fruit than it is capable of successfully carrying to maturity. Branches may break, and the peaches typically have poor color and taste. To prevent limb breakage and ensure good fruit quality, excess fruit must be removed or thinned.

Hand thin the tree about four weeks after full bloom, spacing the peaches about 6 inches apart on the limbs. When thinning by hand, grasp the stem or branch firmly between the thumb and forefinger and pull the fruit off with a quick motion of the second and third fingers.

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Horticulture Hints



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

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