

Horticulture Hints



Summer
2013

Landscape Gardening and Ornamentals

Plants Need Care While You're on Vacation

Summer is the time when people commonly take their longest vacations. If you're away from home for more than a few days, however, you could return to find substantial damage to plants if they're left unattended. This problem is especially true for plants growing in containers – both indoors and outside.

The ideal solution is to ask a friend who is knowledgeable about plants to check on your plants regularly and water them when necessary. Be sure to give written instructions on the needs of each plant, since your friend may not be as familiar with your plants as you are.

If indoor plants are going to be on their own, move them away from sunny, bright windows, so they use water less rapidly. Right before leaving on your trip, thoroughly water all of your indoor plants. Plants in small pots tend to dry out the fastest. If you will be gone for more than a few days, enclose these plants (pot and all) in clear plastic bags to retain moisture and prevent drying out. Plants in plastic bags should receive bright light but no direct sun that could cause excessive heat buildup inside the plastic.

Also, before leaving, group all your outdoor container plants together in a shady location near the northern side of a building or under the protective cover of a large shade tree or covered patio, and water them thoroughly. If you'll be gone for more than a few days, inexpensive irrigation timers – available at local nurseries and hardware stores – can work very well when hooked up to an irrigation system. It's probably

easier to use a sprinkler to water a grouping of your container plants, but if you want to be more sophisticated, drip systems also are available.

Water your home grounds very well prior to leaving, especially if there has been little rainfall. A thorough, slow soaking will provide a lasting supply of moisture. Make sure you mulch all flower beds, vegetable gardens, shrub plantings and newly planted trees, too.

Flower beds and vegetable gardens are particularly vulnerable to drought while you are away. To water automatically, place either soaker hoses or sprinklers to cover various beds and areas of your landscape. Connect them to hoses attached to a timer at each faucet you use for irrigation. Set the irrigation timers to come on twice a week and stay on long enough to thoroughly soak an area.

Mulch Matters

Mulches in your garden will prevent many weeds from growing. Weeds that germinate from seed will not be able to sprout under a mulch, and perennial weeds such as nut grass are suppressed and easier to pull since they tend to be more shallow-rooted when mulched.

Mulches break the force of rain drops hitting the soil and that keeps the soil from becoming so compacted. Less compaction of the soil allows for better root growth since more oxygen is available to plant roots in a loose soil.

Mulches shade the soil and keep the soil temperature cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter. This is especially important because

of our high summer temperatures. If the soil becomes too hot, plant health will be affected.

Mulches conserve moisture so we have to water less frequently, and the moisture available to plants is more even and regular.

Another benefit of an organic mulch (leaves, grass clippings, etc.) is that when your crop is removed, you can incorporate the mulch into the soil. The mulch will decay and enrich the soil, improving it for future production.

Dealing With Snails and Slugs

Snails and slugs can be a major problems in summer gardens. They damage plants by chewing holes in the leaves and flowers of ornamentals, particularly low-growing plants with tender leaves, such as impatiens and hostas.

Using commercial baits based on label directions is helpful in reducing the populations of snails and slugs. Baits containing metaldehyde have been a standard and effective treatment for years. Metaldehyde, however, is toxic to dogs and cats, so care must be taken when using it. A newer, much less toxic and safer active ingredient is iron phosphate, commonly sold as Sluggo and other brands. This type of bait is safe, and no special precautions need to be taken when using it.

Trapping also works if you are persistent. It's a good way to monitor population levels. A trap is easily constructed using a small disposable bowl sunk up to its rim and filled halfway with some beer.

Knock Out Roses Need Pruning Twice a Year

Like all everblooming roses we grow in Louisiana (hybrid tea, grandiflora, floribunda, China, noisette, tea, Bourbon, landscape roses, miniature roses and others), Knock Out roses should receive two major prunings a year.

The first pruning is done in late January (south Louisiana) through early to mid-February (Valentine's Day commonly is used as the time to prune in north Louisiana). Pruning later will delay the outstanding spring and summer flowering. There is no set way to prune a Knock Out rose (or other landscape roses). It depends entirely on the desires of the gardener and the situation.

If you want your roses to grow tall and large to form a screen, you would do only light pruning and cut out any dead wood.

In a situation where the bushes have grown too large, decide what size they need to be for the location. Cut the bushes back about a foot shorter than you want them to be (within reason – you should not cut them back shorter than 2 feet tall). A general recommendation for the late winter/early spring pruning is to reduce the height of the bushes by about one-half to one-third.

We do not prune roses way back during the summer. They already are stressed by the intense heat of June, July and August (you often will notice flowers are smaller and not as pretty). But where size control is needed, it is possible to manage the size of rose bushes to some degree during the summer. After a cluster of flowers has faded, it should be removed to keep the bush looking more attractive and to encourage additional flowering. This is called deadheading.

Typically, when we deadhead, we make the cut just above the five-leaflet leaf closest to the flower cluster (or the first five-leaflet leaf you come to as you move down the stem from the cluster of flowers). This removes just a small amount of stem. To control size during summer, however, you may cut back to just above a leaf farther down the stem – down about 6 to 8 inches below the faded flowers – when you deadhead.

Roses, including Knock Out roses, also are pruned in late summer – late August (north Louisiana) through early September (south Louisiana). Again, you don't have to be too fussy about it. This pruning is not as severe as the late winter pruning. Plants generally are cut back by about one-third their height, more or less, depending on how much control is needed. Don't forget to remove anything dead when you cut the bushes back. Then fertilize the bushes after this pruning.

Caring for Houseplants and Container Plants

Houseplants put outside for the summer will need to be watered frequently because of the heat. If watering becomes too much of a chore, repot plants into larger containers so they won't dry out as fast.

Also keep in mind that frequently watering leaches nutrients from plants growing outside in containers. Fertilize occasionally with your favorite soluble fertilizer, or use a slow-release fertilizer based on its label directions.

Container plants often are used to add color and to enrich outdoor living areas, such as porches, decks, patios and courtyards. There are a couple of precautions you should be aware of, however.

First, if pots are sitting on a wooden surface, such as a deck, the area under the pot can stay damp enough to stain the wood or even cause wood rot. Boost pots sitting on wood surfaces with pieces of brick, pot feet (available at local nurseries) or other materials so the area under the pot dries out between waterings.

Second, if the pot is sitting on bricks set in soil or sand, or if the pot is sitting on soil, the roots can grow out of the drainage holes and into the ground below. This can cause real problems. The plants begin to rely on the roots in the soil and when you attempt to move the pot you will have to cut or break the roots in the ground. This causes shock to the plant and should be avoided. Prevent this from occurring by lifting pots occasionally, or boost pots off the ground as recommended for wood surfaces. You also can simply make sure pots are not placed in a situation where the roots can grow into the ground.



LouEASYana GARDENING

Walks in Garden Are Gardener's Most Valuable Tool

Since it soon will be getting too hot to do much work, now is the time you can wander around the yard. Although wandering may look aimless, there is a point, and the more you can do it the better.

During these walks, you can mark gaps and note which plants are doing poorly. You then can make plans and decide which plants might need to be transplanted or replaced this fall. You also can see the beginnings of pest and disease attacks, the onset of weed problems, the need for water, the overgrown plants that might need to be pruned back or supported and the faded flowers that need to be removed. If you catch these problems early, you will have a much easier time correcting them, and the plants will be better off as a result.

Most important, wandering around your yard gives you a chance to savor and appreciate what your efforts have accomplished. Don't let life's hectic pace keep you from enjoying what you have worked so hard to create. Take the time.

The gardener's most valuable tool, you see, is these moments of undivided attention you give to your garden. And I think you will find they benefit you as much as they do the garden.





Checklist for Summer

- ☐ Control thrips, aphids, cucumber beetles and spider mites on roses by using a recommended insecticide or miticide. Also, continue blackspot control by using a recommended fungicide at seven- to 10-day intervals.
- ☐ When irrigating, water the soil area thoroughly. Try to irrigate less often, but irrigate well each time. Light, overhead sprinkling is not the best way to water.
- ☐ Continue to plant warm-season bedding plants such as Mexican heather, ornamental peppers, ornamental sweet potatoes, angelonia, coleus, impatiens, periwinkle, cosmos, begonia, pentas, globe amaranth, ageratum, salvia, marigold, portulaca, blue daze, perennial verbena, purslane, dusty miller, rudbeckia, abelmoschus, narrow-leaf zinnia, Profusion zinnia, wishbone flower (torenia), caladium, balsam, gerbera daisy, gaillardia, celosia, lantana, scaevola, melampodium, butterfly weed, shrimp plant, cleome, four o'clock, perilla, hardy hibiscus (mallow), sunflower, salvias and cigar flower.
- ☐ Bandana series lantana and Little Ruby alternanthera are outstanding summer bedding plants that can be planted in pots or beds throughout the summer. They are Louisiana Super Plants selections for spring 2013. For more information on the LSU AgCenter's Louisiana Super Plants program, go to www.lsuagcenter.com/superplants.
- ☐ Dig and store gladiolus corms in a well-ventilated, freeze-proof place for planting next spring. Also, remove old foliage on caladiums.
- ☐ Plant sunflowers in late summer for fall flower arrangements. Flower colors include yellow, orange, red, bronze, white and combinations of these. It usually requires about 60-80 days from sowing seed until first flower color.
- ☐ Prune azaleas no later than mid-July. Pruning azaleas after early summer to midsummer may remove next season's developing flower buds. This applies to most spring-flowering shrubs, as well as hydrangeas and gardenias.
- ☐ In early summer, gardenias may have aphids, whiteflies and the associated black sooty mold. For optimum plant performance, control the insects with Orthene or a summer horticultural oil spray.
- ☐ Camellias and azaleas need care to set a good crop of flower buds for next year. Healthy, vigorous plants will set buds, but weak plants may not. If plants lack vigor, fertilize, provide moisture during stressful periods and control pests. Remember that these acid-loving plants need a pH of 5.5. Submit a soil sample to your nearest LSU AgCenter Extension Service office if you are not sure about your soil situation.
- ☐ Louisiana irises are somewhat dormant during the late summer. Prune off seedpods and yellow or brown foliage to keep the plants more attractive. You may transplant or divide Louisiana irises beginning in August.
- ☐ Cut faded flowers from flowering annuals and perennials to encourage new growth and flowers. Old blooms and seed heads left on the plants can retard continued flower production.
- ☐ Finish any pruning you may need to do to shrubs in the landscape, particularly those that bloom in winter or spring. Pruning later (after June) may interfere with flowering.
- ☐ High temperatures and high humidity create a high heat index here during the summer. Adjust your gardening schedule to take advantage of cooler times of the day. With today's concern for sun-related skin cancer, wear a wide brim hat and sunscreen when gardening in the sun. Also, remember to drink plenty of water.
- ☐ Don't neglect to harvest herbs such as mints, basil, rosemary, lemon balm and Mexican tarragon regularly to keep the plants shapely and under control. Some herbs such as thyme, sage and lavender tolerate heat and rain poorly and may not be doing well now as a result.
- ☐ Fine, silvery webbing appearing on the bark of trees during summer and fall is completely harmless. The webbing is produced by tiny scavenging insects called bark lice. There is no need to spray with insecticides.
- ☐ Prune everblooming roses back about one-third their height in late August or early September. Also, remove any dead canes and weak, spindly growth. This pruning prepares the roses for the outstanding blooming season in October and November. Do not cut back once-blooming roses, which only bloom in spring and early summer, because that will reduce flowering next year.
- ☐ Small yellow aphids on your butterfly weed or milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) will not damage the plants or affect the feeding of adult and larval monarch butterflies. Do not attempt to control them since that might adversely affect the caterpillars.
- ☐ Summer rains will encourage the growth of weeds along with the ornamentals in your garden beds. Do not let weeds get out of hand before dealing with the situation.
- ☐ Keep caladiums well watered during hot, dry weather to keep the foliage in good shape through the summer. You may apply a fertilizer based on label directions to encourage vigorous growth. Break off any flowers that form.

Dan Gill, Consumer Horticulture



June

The summer crop of tomatoes (heat-set cultivars) should be planted in mid-June. Planting heat-set tomatoes is very important since these cultivars will yield even with high day and night temperatures. If managed correctly, heat-set tomatoes will produce fruit through October. Examples of heat-set tomatoes include Florida 91, Solar Set and Sun Master, along with several others. Heat-set tomatoes can be planted again in late July for fall tomato production.

Collard greens, cucumbers, watermelons, cantaloupes, okra, southern peas, pumpkins and summer squash can be direct-seeded into the garden during June.

You will want to start transplants of eggplants, peppers and sweet potato slips during June, as well.

July

Transplant your fall crop of heat-set tomatoes. Bell pepper transplants may be planted now.

Okra, southern peas, cucumbers, squash, cantaloupes, pumpkins and watermelons can be seeded in July. Mid-July is the optimum time to plant pumpkins for a Halloween harvest!

Late July is an excellent time to start thinking about your fall garden. Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, cabbage and collard greens should be seeded into trays for later planting. Keeping these plants outside a greenhouse environment may burn them up.

August

Plant bush snap beans and bush lima beans in the garden. You also can plant seed trays of broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, cabbage, collard greens, cucumbers, squash, southern peas, mustard greens and shallots.

In mid-August, you will want to transplant your broccoli and Brussels sprouts into the garden. In north Louisiana, start your lettuce seeds and plant beet and Irish potato seeds in the garden. In late August, south Louisiana gardeners can start their lettuce seeds and plant beet and Irish potato seeds into the garden.

Summer Vegetables Somewhat Limited But We Can Plant Year-round

We've luckily received a very cool spring season for 2013. But now it's time to warm up!

You'll notice that vegetables planted in mid-March and early April now are thriving and producing. But that doesn't mean the planting season is over. Vegetables can be planted year-round in Louisiana. During the hot summer months, our choices and potential cultivars are somewhat limited, but there is still fun to be had in the garden.

As temperatures warm and plants grow, you also will notice insect pressure slightly increases. Stink bugs and others find their way to your garden. Remember to scout for insects each week! Regular scouting and application of insecticides are necessary, as needed, to produce quality fruit.

In addition, you need to remember to water. Most vegetable plants need about an inch of rain or irrigation water each week. In the intense heat, however, these requirements can change.

If you are using drip irrigation or soaker hoses, check regularly for leaks. Avoid overhead watering to limit diseases. And never let your plants wilt! Keep the soil moist but not soaking wet. Critical watering times are during the first two weeks and bloom periods.

Crop Highlights

Broccoli and cauliflower. Both can be direct-seeded starting in mid-July and continuing through September or they can be transplanted from early August through early September. It takes four to six weeks to produce transplants from seed. In general, broccoli and cauliflower will require 5 to 6 pounds (or pints) of a complete fertilizer such as 8-24-24 or 13-13-13 per 100 feet of row. These crops, especially cauliflower, require fast, continuous growth for proper head development. Keep them well watered and fertilized. Side-dress plants with 3/4 pound (1 1/2 cups) of ammonium nitrate per 100 feet of row three weeks after transplanting and again two weeks after that. Varieties that will produce in about 60 days from transplanting reduce the chance of cold weather damage.

Recommended varieties are:

- Broccoli: Gypsy, Diplomat, Packman
- Cauliflower: Majestic, Candid Charm, Cumberland, Snow Crown, Freedom

Snap beans. Late August through early September is the best time to plant snap beans. Normally, 50 to 55 days are required from planting until harvest. Don't let beans suffer from drought. Good varieties are Provider, Roma II, Derby, Bronco, Royal Burgundy, Green Crop, Strike and Caprice. For a yellow wax bean, choose Golden Rod Wax. Bush beans usually will produce more successfully than pole beans during the fall because of their earlier maturity.

Lima beans. This crop is harder to produce than snap beans during the fall. Plant early enough to produce before frost and late enough so they're not blooming while temperatures are too high for fruit set. For example, planting from early August through about mid-August is ideal. Plant bush beans for fall production (Henderson, Fordhook 242, Thorgreen, Jackson Wonder or Dixie Butterpea).



Irish potatoes. Plant small whole potatoes saved from the spring crop from about mid-August to early September. Good soil moisture is essential. The seed potatoes may not sprout readily after planting because of a physiological rest period of about 90 days they have to go through after harvesting during the spring. After this rest period is satisfied, the tubers should sprout. Fall yields are lower than spring yields. Use the smaller potatoes (that you harvested) for seed pieces.

Cabbage. Plant seeds beginning in mid-July through September. You also may transplant beginning in early August through mid-October. Fertilize the same as broccoli and cauliflower. Space cabbage, cauliflower and Chinese cabbage about 12 to 14 inches apart and broccoli 6 to 12 inches apart. Double drilling (two drills of plants spaced 10-12 inches apart on a single row) will help maximize yield. Try Rio Verde for late plantings. Recommended early maturity varieties include Platinum, Dynasty, Gold Dynasty and Stonehead (an All-America Selections winner). Maturing a little later are Rio Verde, Solid Blue 780, Red Dynasty, Emblem, Blue Dynasty, Thunderhead Royal Vantage, Silver Dynasty, Blue Thunder, Cheers, Vantage Point, Savoy Ace (All-America Selections) and Savoy King (All-America Selections).



Squash and cucumbers. These two crops can be planted in June, July and August. Summer plantings will be ready to harvest after about six weeks. Fall yields usually are lower than spring plantings. A fall crop of yellow summer squash, zucchini and cucumbers can be grown by planting seed during August. Squash vine borers may be a more severe problem during fall than spring, so be prepared to control them with an insecticide. Viruses are a problem during the fall. The best cucumber to plant is Dasher II or Olympian.

Pumpkins. Pumpkins for Halloween should be planted during early to mid-July. Apply 3-5 pounds of a complete fertilizer (13-13-13) for each 100 feet of row before planting. Plant five to six seeds in each of your hills spaced about every 4 to 5 feet on rows 6 to 8 feet apart. Thin to one or two plants per hill. Apply a side-dressing of 1 pound (1 pint) of ammonium nitrate per 100 feet of row when vines begin to run. Keep soil moist for best production. Autumn Harvest, Orange Smoothie, Cinderella,



Silver Moon and Conestoga are excellent varieties to grow for Halloween. Recommended

varieties of giant pumpkins are Atlantic Giant and Prize Winner, but remember that Louisiana is not the best area in which to grow pumpkins, so don't fret if you do not reach award-winning sizes. Watch for worms, and spray routinely once they appear!

Greens. Begin planting greens – mustard, turnip and collard – during August. Keep the soil moist to ensure a good stand. Try some of the white turnips like White Lady and Tokyo Cross for roots and Seven Top, All Top, Topper and Southern Green for greens. Also good are Just Right, Royal Crown, Purple Top WG and Red Giant.

Shallots. Dry sets of shallots can be planted from August to April. About 50 to 60 days after planting, tops will be ready to harvest.

Fall bell peppers. If plants from the spring are still in good condition they can be nursed (sprayed or dusted and watered) throughout summer. They will set fruit again when the temperatures become more favorable. If seeds of bell peppers haven't been planted by early June, buy transplants.

Fall tomatoes. Transplant fall tomatoes during July. Be prepared to spray with insecticides and fungicides. Insect and disease pressure usually is worse during the fall than the spring. The heat-set varieties that have produced well in trials are Sun Leaper, Florida 91, Sun Master, Solar Fire, Sun Chaser, Phoenix, Solar Set and Heat Wave II. These varieties have the ability to set some fruit during times of high temperatures, allowing the fruit to mature before cool weather. Row covers, which protect the plants from the first frost, have prolonged the harvest period and enhanced fruit maturity. Also worth trying during fall is BHN 216. Since fall tomatoes are a crop you can't really be sure of, it's interesting to try several early varieties. Certain varieties may produce better in some parts of the state than others because of the variations in climates and soils. Start early, and get a strong bush.



Lettuce. Head lettuce can be grown in Louisiana during late August. A common mistake is planting the seed too deeply. Many lettuce cultivars require light for germination, so scatter the seed on the row and lightly rake it into the soil. Plant leaf lettuce during September. Keep the soil moist until the seeds have germinated and are well established. Head types are tougher to grow. Recommended varieties of head lettuce are Summertime, Ithaca and Maverick. For leaf lettuce, try Slobolt, Red Salad Bowl, Grand Rapids, Red Fire, Tango, Red Sails, Salad Bowl, Sunset, Simpson or Elite. The recommended romaine lettuce varieties are Parris Island, Ideal, Green Forest and Green Towers. For butterhead or bibb lettuce, try Buttercrunch, Esmerelda or Oak Leaf. And for batavia types (leaf lettuce with a unique flavor), try Nevada or Sierra.

Kathryn Fontenot
Home/School/Community Garden Specialist

The Importance of Soil pH in Growing Fruit

Soil pH is a measure of soil acidity. The pH scale goes from zero to 14. A pH of 7 is neutral, while pH levels of 6 or 5 are more acid. A pH of 8 is alkaline.

For most fruit plants, pH levels of 6 to 6.5 are ideal, and levels from 5.5 to 7 are acceptable. The blueberry requires a pH of 4.5 to 5.2 for best growth.

Soils that require pH correction will need applications of agricultural limestone to raise the pH or sulfur to lower the pH. A soil test is needed to determine the soil pH and levels of nutrients present. Suggestions for lime or sulfur applications will be included with the soil test results you receive. You also will receive information on amounts of nutrients in the soil.

Do not apply lime if the soil test does not call for it!

Site Preparation

Have a soil test performed well in advance of planting. A soil test will indicate your soil pH (acidity or alkalinity) as well as the nutrient content (P, K, Ca, Mg). The results you receive give fertilizer, lime or sulfur recommendations for the crops to be grown.

You should adjust soil acidity or alkalinity by adding lime to increase pH or sulfur to decrease pH well before planting, if possible. It also is advisable to incorporate the recommended fertilizer (particularly phosphorus) prior to planting.

Soil Testing

There are several objectives associated with soil testing. They include determination of proper fertilizer application, estimation of nutrient needs in advance of a crop and evaluation of the existence and/or seriousness of any deficiency or toxicity for various crops. The two basic objectives for soil testing are diagnosis to correct nutrient deficiencies and diagnosis to avoid nutrient excesses.

Plants will produce best in a location where they have the proper fertility. There are 12 to 14 soil nutrients considered essential to most plants. There are 14 if you consider nickel and chlorine.

The primary nutrients nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) are used in large quantities and are the three main numbers found on a typical bag of complete fertilizer, such as 13-13-13. Also used in notable amounts are the secondary nutrients calcium, magnesium and sulphur. Other soil nutrients are used in small quantities and are referred to as micronutrients. Although micronutrients are only needed in small quantities, their availability still is important for normal growth.

Interpreting the Fertilizer Bag

All fertilizer labels have three bold numbers. The first number is the amount of nitrogen (N), the second number is the amount of phosphate (P_2O_5) and the third number is the amount of potash (K_2O).

Fertilizer grades are made by mixing two or more nutrient sources together to form a blend, and they are called mixed fertilizers. Blends contain particles of more than one color. Manufacturers produce different grades for the many types of plants. Any additional numbers indicate the levels of other nutrients, and these nutrient levels must be specified on the bag.

You also can get fertilizers that contain only one of each of the primary nutrients. Nitrogen sources include ammonium nitrate (33.5-0-0), urea nitrogen (46-0-0), sodium nitrate (16-0-0) and liquid nitrogen (30-0-0). Phosphorus is provided as 0-46-0 and potash as 0-0-60 or 0-0-50.

To calculate the pounds of nitrogen in a 50-pound bag of 10-10-10 fertilizer, multiply 50 by 0.10. Do the same for calculating the amounts of phosphate and potash. A 50-pound bag of 10-10-10 contains a total of 15 pounds of nutrients – 5 pounds nitrogen, 5 pounds phosphate and 5 pounds potash. The remaining weight is filler, usually sand or granular limestone. This is why, as a general rule, buying a bag of 20-20-20 rather than 10-10-10 usually is a better deal, because you are getting more pounds of nutrients and less filler weight in the bag.

The formula for calculating the amount of nutrients also allows you to compare fertilizers. For example, one bag of urea (46-0-0) provides more than twice as much nitrogen as a bag of ammonium sulfate (21-0-0).

All of the soil nutrients are required at the correct levels and in the correct forms. This is one place where the soil pH, or measure of soil acidity, comes into the picture. The soil pH levels can greatly affect the form and thus the plant availability of a soil nutrient.

Most soil nutrients are very available between pH levels of 6 and 7. Several nutrients become very available at higher pH, and several are very available at pH of 5 to 6. These high availabilities may produce a nutrient toxicity to sensitive plants. Likewise, about six nutrients are much less available at pH levels around 8 and above, and all but iron become less available around 5.5 and 5. Some plants tolerate high (alkaline) pH. Some acid lovers, like blueberries, thrive in a pH of 5.

Organic matter is the third factor in soil fertility. Organic matter doesn't always supply nutrients organically, although the fresher materials may, but it usually makes the soil more friable and workable. The organic matter can help stabilize soil pH but it is known mainly for its nutrient storing capacity. The nutrients that go through the soil can be held on the organic matter for later exchanges to plant roots. Good soil test levels of organic matter generally are 2 percent to 3 percent for true soil.

The best combination of these three factors should be offered for best growth, health and fruiting. A good way to figure out what you have and what is needed is a laboratory soil test. The LSU AgCenter's routine soil test gives you pH, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, magnesium, sodium (salt) and texture.

In general, soils that differ in appearance, crop growth or past treatment should be sampled separately, provided the area is of such size and nature that it can be fertilized separately. For each sample, collect soil from 10 or more places in each sampling area in a zigzag fashion so as to make a representative sample. Mix that soil thoroughly before filling a sampling carton or container to be sent to the lab.

Avoid sampling directly in the fertilized band. Proper sampling depth depends on the kind of crop you plan to grow. We recommend that for turf and established orchards, you take the top 2-3 inches of soil and for cultivated crops you collect the upper 5-6 inches of soil.

You need to take soil samples every few years to ensure that you know the current fertility conditions. We recommend that you collect and submit samples three to five months before your projected planting date to ensure you have time to plan your liming and fertilization program for the upcoming season. You need to send at least 1 pint of soil for each sample to the lab for analysis.

David Himelrick, Fruit Specialist

Lawns

Tips for Summer Care of Turfgrass

Summer is the prime growing season for lawns in Louisiana.

If you did not fertilize your lawn during the spring, you still have time to fertilize and get your lawn in good shape prior to fall. Keep up a good fertility program through early to late August. Apply all granular materials on a dry lawn and water soon after application.

St. Augustine grass and zoysia both respond well to fertilizer applications. Fertilize zoysia twice per growing season – in April and again around June/July. St. Augustine may be fertilized three times during the growing season – April, June and mid-August. Bermuda grass is an even bigger fertilizer user and can be fertilized from three to eight times during the growing season, especially if you like to mow grass. Carpet grass and centipede are not big fertilizer users. Usually, two applications will take care of centipede grass (April and July), and one application will be sufficient for carpet grass (April).

Centipede grass should receive its second and last fertilizer application in July. For centipede, apply only 1/2 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet as a complete turf fertilizer. For example, apply 3 pounds of 17-0-17 per 1,000 square feet or 5 pounds of 10-0-10 per 1,000 square feet. St. Augustine grass would need twice that rate.

Fertilize St. Augustine, Bermuda grass and zoysia in June and again in early to mid-August with at least 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. For example, apply 7 pounds of 13-13-13 per 1,000 square feet or 5 pounds of 19-19-19 per 1,000 square feet.

Make sure lawns are getting adequate amounts of moisture during the summer months, but don't overwater. Water deeply only once or twice per week – or as needed, based on the amount of rainfall. Centipede grass is the least tolerant lawn to drought, so take care to provide adequate amounts of moisture for this grass, especially during dry periods.

Watch for chinch bugs in St. Augustine and Bermuda grass lawns and treat with an LSU AgCenter recommended insecticide. Chinch bug problems show up as yellowish brown areas of the lawn during hot and dry weather. These insects extract plant juices from turfgrass stems and crowns while pumping toxic salivary fluids into the plant. The fluids disrupt the plant's vascular system.

Check for chinch bugs in the lawn by saturating suspected areas with a gallon of water mixed with a few squirts of lemon dishwashing soap. This soapy solution irritates chinch bugs and brings them up near the grass surface so you can see them and determine if the bugs are causing the lawn damage.

Additional insect problems that appear during the summer include army worms and tropical sod webworms. These moth larvae or "worms" can cause severe lawn damage very quickly and will need to be killed with insecticides to prevent further damage. Be mindful of these pests as you walk through your lawns. Investigate damaged areas and treat accordingly.

Weed management is difficult in St. Augustine and centipede lawns because herbicides can cause severe lawn injury when temperatures exceed 90 degrees. Limit applications to careful spot treatments to reduce lawn injury.

Pull up small populations of Virginia buttonweed or carefully spot treat with products like Ferti-lome Weed Free Zone or Ortho Weed B Gon. It is a good idea to begin spot treatments as early as April. Once temperatures exceed 90 degrees, herbicides such as Weed Free Zone and Weed B Gon are too damaging to St. Augustine grass and centipede grass. Mature buttonweed plants that have been allowed to grow all summer will be uncontrollable with common herbicides available to consumers. Inspect the lawn often and pull weeds by hand, or spot treat areas with herbicides to prevent the formation of large mats of these weeds by the end of the summer.

Ron Strahan, Weed Scientist/Turfgrass Specialist



Saturday, June 15

7:30 a.m.-1 p.m.

LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens
at Burden

4560 Essen Lane . Baton Rouge

Enjoy the Fun

Hayrides to Fruit and Vegetable Plots
Outstanding Tomato Contest
All-America Selections
and Children's Garden Tours
Children's Activities
Garden Fest Cocktail Contest
Red Stick Idol Contest
and Live Music
Sample Fresh Local Gourmet Dishes
Plant and Produce Sale

Adults: \$10 . Children 4 to 10: \$5
Children 3 and younger: FREE

For information, visit:
LSUAgCenter.com/Burden
or call 225-763-3990



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School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences
Horticulture Division
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Horticulture Hints



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

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