

Horticulture Hints



Winter
2012-2013

Landscape Gardening and Ornamentals

Checklist for December/January/February

- Plant tulips and hyacinth bulbs that previously have been refrigerated for six to eight weeks in late December or early January.
- Daffodil bulbs can be planted through late December if you find them on sale at nurseries. They do not have to be refrigerated before planting. Excellent cultivars that come back and bloom for years in Louisiana include Ice Follies, Fortune, Carlton and Unsurpassable.
- Remove old flowers from your cool-season bedding plants to extend blooming and improve flower performance.
- Plant gladiolus in late February in south Louisiana and in early March in north Louisiana. Prolong the blooming season by planting at two- to three-week intervals through early April.
- Mulch shrub and flower beds to 2 to 3 inches deep to minimize weed problems.
- Watch azaleas in February for lacebugs. They cause the foliage to have numerous small white spots as they feed underneath lower foliage. Control with horticultural oil sprays or acephate.
- A late winter planting of petunias will provide a good flower show for early spring. Consider the Wave, Tidal Wave and Supertunia series.
- Winter is a great time for planting trees. Some excellent native species for Louisiana include nuttall oak, southern red oak, willow oak, red maple, southern magnolia, bald cypress and mayhaw.
- February is the ideal time to fertilize trees. Trees in their first 10 years after planting generally benefit the most from fertilization. Trees in low vigor also should be fertilized.
- January and February are good months to prune landscape trees and any deciduous and evergreen plants that don't flower in the spring.
- Clean and sharpen tools before you put them away for winter. Wipe the metal blades with an oily cloth that coats them with a thin layer of protective oil to help prevent corrosion. Coat wooden handles with protectants such as a sealer, tung oil or varnish.
- February is a good time to plant container or bare-root roses. Bare-root rose bushes should be planted by the end of February. Early planting allows rose bushes to become established in their new locations before they begin to bloom. This increases the number and quality of flowers, and the bushes are more prepared to deal with summer heat when it arrives in May. Plant roses in sunny, well-prepared beds that have excellent drainage.
- Look for Louisiana Super Plants at your local nurseries. These plants have been selected for their outstanding beauty and reliability in the landscape. Participating nurseries will have signs and logos indicating the Super Plants selections they carry. To find the closest participating nursery to where you live, go to www.LSUAgCenter.com/SuperPlants.
- Trim back dormant ornamental grasses in late February. It is important to remove the brown leaves before the new growth emerges and mixes with the dead growth. Electric hedge trimmers are a good tool to use for this job.



Plant tulips this fall for spring flowers.



There's Still Time To Plant La. Super Plants

The Louisiana Super Plants program is an LSU AgCenter educational and marketing campaign that highlights tough and beautiful plants that perform well in Louisiana landscapes.

Louisiana Super Plants selections have a history of outstanding performance in Louisiana or have gone through several years of university evaluations and observations. Louisiana Super Plants are "university tested and industry approved."

Here are the Louisiana Super Plants for fall 2012:

'Conversation Piece' Azalea

Flower size on 'Conversation Piece' azaleas can be nearly 4 inches across, and flowers of different colors, including dark pink, variegated pink and white and nearly white, appear on the same plant. It is a low-growing, mounding evergreen shrub useful as a color accent or in a foundation planting in partly shaded areas.

Sorbet Series Viola

Sorbet violas are the best flowering violas in LSU AgCenter trials. They are completely winter hardy in Louisiana and come in a multitude of bright colors.

Evergreen Sweet Bay Magnolia

The evergreen sweet bay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana* var. *Australis*) is an excellent native tree that retains its leaves through the winter. Mature trees will average about 30 feet tall with a spread of 20 feet, but larger sizes are common.



Holiday Cactus Available in November, December

Thanksgiving cactuses and Christmas cactuses have been hybridized with each other to the point that we now group today's cultivars together under the catchall name holiday cactus. They bloom from November through January and generally are purchased in November and December.

When you get them home, place them near a bright, sunny window and keep the soil evenly moist. It is quite common for these plants to drop flower buds when you get them home, but there is little you can do about that. Still, many blooms and buds will hold on, and their great beauty in shades of magenta, red, pink, orange, gold or white make their purchase worth it.

Holiday cactuses will reward you with blooms every year for many years if grown correctly. After all the flowers have dropped off, allow the soil to become fairly dry between waterings, and keep the plant in a bright window. An east or west window will provide plenty of light. They also will thrive on a porch or patio in a semishaded position during the summer.

They are triggered to bloom by long nights and chilly nighttime temperatures in the 50s. The easiest way to get a plant to bloom again is to place it outdoors in October (if you have been growing it inside). Leave it outside, allowing the progressively longer and cooler nights to initiate buds to form. (Do not leave the plant out on a night when a freeze is predicted, however.) Once you see little flower buds at the tips of the branches, move the plant into a bright window inside and keep the soil evenly moist.



Camellias in Containers

Camellias are almost indispensable in the southern landscape and are well loved for their large colorful winter blooms from December to April. Their shiny evergreen foliage also stays attractive through the winter.

Even more, as beautiful as they are in the ground, camellias adapt happily to life in containers and are particularly impressive grown that way.

Growing camellias in containers allows gardeners to cultivate them where ground space is not available, such as an apartment balcony or a deck or patio. It also allows you to move a plant around to different locations – bringing it to a prominent position while its flowers are at their best and placing it in a more out-of-the-way spot at other times, for instance.

Their cold hardiness means you can leave them outside through the winter, except for the rare occasions when temperatures go below 20 degrees because the root ball might freeze.

The type of pot you choose is as much a matter of taste as what is best for the camellias. Black plastic pots from the nursery work fine but look a bit too utilitarian for most landscapes. Decorative plastic in muted colors, terra cotta, fiberglass, glazed pottery and wood all make suitable containers (although termites make wood a questionable choice). Whatever container you choose, make sure the drainage holes are adequate.

The drainage also is affected by the potting mix you use. Do not use garden soil. Instead, choose fast-draining soil mixes specifically blended for use in containers.

Eventually, a camellia will require a container about 2 feet wide and 2 feet deep as it reaches maturity. This takes a number of years, however, and it is best to grow camellias in smaller pots that are appropriate to their size, gradually shifting them to larger containers as they outgrow the ones they are in. The camellia is not one of those plants that will suffer the minute it gets a bit pot-bound, but you shouldn't allow it to remain in that state for more than a year or two. Otherwise, the growth will be stunted and flowers few.

When repotting, shift the plant into a new pot only a few inches or one size larger. Planting into an excessively larger pot creates a situation where over watering and root rot are more likely to occur.

When repotting your camellia, do not plant it any deeper than it was growing in its original container. Also, the level of the soil should be an inch or two lower than the rim of the pot to facilitate watering.

You do need to water regularly, even daily, during hot, summer weather. Camellias are likely to drop their flower buds if you allow them to become too dry before watering. Fertilization is best accomplished with a soluble fertilizer for acid-loving plants applied once or twice a month during the spring and summer. Or use a slow-release fertilizer applied once in the spring.

When you think about plants in containers to embellish your front entrance, patio, courtyard, balcony or deck, don't forget the outstandingly beautiful camellia.



LouEASyana GARDENING

Louisiana is known for many things – spicy food, Cajun and Zydeco music, and people with funny accents! We are not, however, known for fall foliage. Tourists are more likely to visit Louisiana for alligator sightings than pretty fall colors!

That being said, however, there are a few trees that both thrive in Louisiana and provide excellent fall color. Species include Tallow trees (*Sapium sebifera*), some of you may refer to these as chicken seed trees, Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*) and red swamp maples (*Acer rubrum* var. *drummondii*), among others.

But fall color is not the premise of this article. Easy gardening is the premise, and although they may lack color, Louisiana leaves make excellent mulch material for your vegetable and ornamental gardens. Collecting and placing fallen leaves into the garden is much simpler than pulling weeds.

Not only is mulching with leaves an excellent simple alternative to weeding, those leaves also happen to be free!

Here are a few tips to follow when using foliage as mulch in your garden areas:

- If the leaves from the trees in your yard are large, such as with sycamore trees, chop leaves up prior to placing them in the garden so the wind does not carry them away. Hint: For easy chopping, run over them with your lawn mower a few times.
- Put enough leaves down to create a 4-6 inch layer of mulch material. You want to prevent sunlight from reaching the soil surface so weed seeds do not germinate and emerge.
- Don't have trees? Don't want to pick up the leaves in your yard? Drive around on garbage day and pick up other people's collected and bagged leaves! You may have to sort through a few unwanted items such as large sticks, but it's well worth the mulch!
- If enough of us follow this LouEASyana gardening tip, Louisiana might become known for its music, food, accents, and clean, weed-free gardens.



Avoid Encouraging Termites

While fall and winter are excellent times for adding hardy trees, shrubs and ground covers to the landscape, these seasons also are



times to be cautious about creating problems that could bring termites into your home.

LSU AgCenter experts offer these suggestions to reduce the possibility of termite problems:

- Place gutters and slope your landscape beds so water drains away from your house.
- Keep mulch in beds adjacent to the house pulled back about 12 inches from the foundation.
- Do not add fill dirt around the foundation or under porches or steps without contacting your termite company for retreatment.
- Do not disturb the chemical barrier at the base of the slab or around pilings by digging into it during bed preparation.
- Promptly remove all scrap wood and wooden debris from the landscape.
- Pine straw appears to be the mulch that is least attractive to termites. Avoid using wood chips to mulch beds adjacent to the house or other structures.
- Use metal edging, decorative bricks or border plants to edge your beds. Avoid landscape timbers, railroad ties or other wooden materials that may serve as food for termites.
- When watering, avoid spraying water against the foundation of your house.
- Leave at least 2 inches of space between your house and a deck or other wooden structure outside. Build decks and other structures on concrete pads and treat around the pads and posts.
- Do not allow clinging vines, such as English ivy or creeping fig, to grow on the wall of your house.

What Is in a Name?

In what is probably one of the most quoted lines from Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliette*, Juliette says, "What is in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." The point being, what something is does not change based on what we call it. A rose is going to look, smell and be what it is regardless of what name we give it.

But in gardening, knowing the proper names of plants is important. We need to know and properly use plant names for a variety of reasons.

Knowing the proper name is the key to finding information about a plant. There is not much a professional can do to provide care information if the gardener does not know the proper name of the plant. Or if you want to look up information about a new plant in a reference book or on the Internet, you have to have the right name for the plant to do that. Knowing the right name also is important in finding and purchasing a particular plant you want. Plants are known by both common and Latin names.

Common names are easier to pronounce and remember, and most gardeners get by using them exclusively. But they have their limits. Latin names are the most reliable names to know and use. Unfortunately, people generally don't like Latin names. Everyone is intimidated by those long, unpronounceable strings of letters that make up the Latin names of some plants.

Why, you might ask, deal with these unfamiliar and foreign words? Although common names are useful, they change from region to region – and around the world – for the same plant. Several different common names can apply to the same plant, or one common name can apply to several different plants. You can see how easily confusion can creep into this situation. Each plant, however, has only one official Latin name, and it is used worldwide.

In the age of international Internet communication about plants, Latin names are becoming increasingly important. So I would encourage you to put aside what I call your "nomenclaturephobia" and try to use Latin names more often in your gardening efforts. For that, it helps to understand a little bit about Latin names.

Binomial nomenclature is the scientific system developed by Carl von Linne (Linnaeus) in the 1700s that gives a two-part name to each plant or animal. The first name, the genus, is followed by a descriptive name, the species. The genus and species together form the scientific or Latin name of a plant.

The genus is a group of closely related plants that have many shared characteristics, such as *Quercus* – the oaks; *Ulmus* – the elms; and *Lilium* – the lilies. The genus actually can stand alone. When you see the word *Quercus*, you know it refers to oaks.

A genus is subdivided into species. When a species name is added to *Quercus*, you have the name of a particular type of oak, such as *Quercus virginiana*, the live oak, or *Quercus shumardii*, the Shumard oak. The species name must be paired with a genus to mean anything. It is meaningless by itself.

Since they are in a foreign language, Latin names generally are italicized or underlined in text. Pronunciation often is a challenge, but you should just do your best. And you don't have to know how to pronounce a Latin name to recognize it or write it, so it's not an insurmountable obstacle. These days, there are even websites and magazines that provide helpful pronunciation guides.

So although you may hate them, scientific names often are critical to properly identifying plants. And whenever you are asking questions, doing research or looking to buy a particular plant, there are many instances where having the Latin name will make your efforts more successful.

Dan Gill, Horticulturist

Fruits

Avocados for Louisiana

Cold hardiness is the single most important limiting factor for avocado production in Louisiana. Unfortunately, research-based information on this topic is nonexistent. There are several influences that are known to affect cold hardiness, however.

The acclimatizing temperatures the plant has experienced prior to the potential damaging temperatures can be important in ensuring that the plant is at maximum hardiness. A quick cold snap after weeks of warm temperatures makes the plant more susceptible to injury. The duration of the potential damaging temperatures also can be part of the dynamic that determines how

much damage is sustained. And the final factor is the minimum temperatures the plant actually experiences.

Collectively, these determine if the plant is damaged. Additionally, young trees tend to be less cold hardy than mature trees by something like 1 to 6 degrees Fahrenheit.



I have heard that some varieties can tolerate ranges as low as 15-18 F for a few hours and also that damage can be expected at 25-26 F.

The races of avocados are West Indian, Guatemalan and Mexican. In general, the Mexican and Mexican hybrid ecotypes are the most cold hardy of the three ecotypes (also known as races).

The Mexican type has relatively small fruit, 75-300 grams (2.6-10.6 ounces) in weight, a thin, smooth black skin, and a loose seed. This type has the highest oil content (sometimes 30 percent) and grows in the driest and coolest locations. The varieties that are most often mentioned as being the most cold hardy include 'Pryor' ('Fantastic'), 'Lila', 'Joey', 'Brazos Belle', 'Pancho' and 'Winter Mexican'.

Avocados are easily propagated by germinating the large seed (pit). This will produce a tree of unknown quality, however, which will have questionable cold hardiness. Homeowners should purchase only known grafted varieties from the list above.

Floral induction occurs during the fall and winter following cessation of summer vegetative growth. Floral initiation requires exposure to cool temperatures below 68 F. Optimum day/night temperatures during flowering for normal flowering behavior are around 75 F/68 F. Cross-pollination between two different varieties probably is not necessary but does tend to increase fruit set and fruit size.

This fruit is truly unusual, not only because it is oily and not sweet, but also because it never softens while still on the tree, where it remains hard and continues to grow. Avocados keep fairly well while hard but can turn soft overnight. To ripen an avocado, place the fruit into a small paper bag, including an apple or banana if you are in a hurry. Anyone who has prepared guacamole dip knows the green flesh blackens fairly rapidly, and this can be retarded by immediately mixing with lemon (acidic) juice. To keep the green flesh of a cut avocado from turning black, you can immediately wash the cut surface with cold water before wrapping it in a plastic bag.

Dr. David Himelrick

Louisiana Master Gardener Volunteer Program

The LSU AgCenter's Louisiana Master Gardener Volunteer Program offers the public a wonderful combination of horticultural training and leadership opportunities.

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 instruction for beginners as well as experienced gardeners.

Classes are offered in more than 21 parishes across the state, with 54 parishes benefitting from Master Gardener volunteer involvement. Master Gardener classes offer 40 to 50 hours of instruction on a variety of interesting horticultural topics. As a Master Gardener, you will learn about insects and diseases, ornamental plants, fruits and vegetables and soil fertility, as well as how to diagnose plant problems.

In exchange for horticultural 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. Participants in the Master Gardener program not only become better gardeners, they learn how to help youths and adults with gardening needs. Depending on the community needs, this may include environmental improvement activities, parish fairs, plant health clinics, civic meetings and community and school gardening programs.

Enjoy the satisfaction that more than 2,000 citizens across the state are experiencing as certified Louisiana Master Gardeners. For more information on the Louisiana Master Gardener program, contact your parish LSU AgCenter office or visit the LSU AgCenter Master Gardener website at www.LSUAgCenter.com/MasterGardener.

Rene' G. Schmit
State Master Gardener Coordinator



The fall season is a great time to grow vegetables. The weather is pleasant, and insect and weed pressures are less severe – with the exception of caterpillars. Watch out for these pesky pests on all crops, especially your cabbage!

Prepare your soil, and start seeding up crops. If you act quickly, you might even pull off a crop or two to add to your Thanksgiving and Christmas feasts! People often brag of their homemade recipes. Yours will be even better if they're home-grown and homemade!

Read the vegetable crop highlights, and give winter vegetables a try!



Crop Highlights

Onions: Transplant pencil-size onion plants from mid-December through January.

Fertilize with 6 to 7 pounds of a complete fertilizer such as 8-24-24 or 13-13-13 per 100 feet of row (about 0.6-0.7 pounds per 10 feet of row) about two weeks before transplanting.

Space plants about 3 inches to 4 inches apart in the row. Several drills may be planted on a row with 6-inch to 12-inch spacing between drills.

Side-dress onions, shallots and garlic when growth starts in early February. Use $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of ammonium nitrate or $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of calcium nitrate between every other plant. Two additional side-dressings at two-week to three-week intervals will increase bulb size.

Control weeds during early November and December. Control thrips with Malathion!

Shallots: Shallot sets can be planted any time during the winter. If you have some growing in the garden, replant several as you harvest by cutting back tops and separating bulbs and transplanting them again. Separate plants during December and January for next year's sets.

Cabbage, Broccoli, Cauliflower and Chinese Cabbage: Cabbage planted now may encounter low temperatures. Temperatures in the low 20s will injure some of the cabbage, and lower temperatures will freeze many varieties. Recommended varieties for winter production are Bravo, Cheers, Blue Vantage, Emblem, Vantage Point and Rio Verde. For reds, try Cardinal, Red Rookie 831, Red Rookie or Salad Bowl.

Bolting may occur. Bolting is caused when plants go dormant because of prolonged exposure to cooler temperatures (45 F and lower). Bolting of the cool-season crops also will occur when late-season crops are exposed to hot temperatures.

Each of these vegetables can be planted directly into the field during January, but cauliflower and Chinese cabbage should not be transplanted until late January or February.

Irish potatoes: Begin planting Irish potatoes around mid-January in south Louisiana and about the first of February in north Louisiana. Fertilize at the rate of 7 to 8 pounds of a complete fertilizer (8-8-8, 13-13-13) or 8-24-24 per 100 feet of row before planting (0.7-0.8 pounds per 10 feet of row).

Cut seed potatoes into blocky pieces that weigh about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 ounces each or are about the size of an egg. Be sure each seed piece has at least one eye. That is where the plant will originate. Irish potato plants may be nipped back by a light frost, but damage usually is not serious.

Plant seed pieces 10 to 15 inches apart in the row.

Transplant Production

Seeds of cole crops such as cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower will germinate well in cool soils (temperatures from 45 to 50 F degrees) but they have earlier germination times at higher soil temperatures. After germination, grow plants at 70 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit for about two months for best results.

Transplants require sunlight. Provide full sunlight all day when seedlings first appear. If starting transplants inside a house, keep on a bright window sill. Most cole crops will be ready to transplant five to six weeks after seeding.

Make sure you harden off your transplants before moving them into the garden. Remove the plants from your home or greenhouse and keep outside for one week. Water less frequently than you did when they were growing indoors.

Plant transplants into the garden early in the morning or early in the evening. Do not wait any longer than one hour after planting to water!

Just an aside, every time the LSU AgCenter gives fertilizer recommendations, they are based on a 100-foot row that is approximately 4 feet wide. For instance, if our recommendations say 6 pounds per 100-foot row, it represents the amount for a 400-square-foot area. If you have a garden that is 10 feet wide and 10 feet long, you have 100 square feet. So, 6 pounds per 400 square feet would be 1.5 pounds for 100 square feet. A pound of 13-13-13 or 8-8-8 is 1 pint or 16 ounces.

Dr. Kathryn Fontenot, Community/School Vegetable Gardens

Turfgrasses and Lawns

December begins a bleak time for warm-season turfgrasses. Most lawns should be dormant or at least close to this stage by Christmas.

Because lawns are not actively growing, fertilizer applications are not needed during the winter. In fact, nitrogen fertilization should have ceased on home lawns by late summer (mid- to late August for St. Augustine grass and centipede grass). Nitrogen fertilizer on dormant to semidormant St. Augustine, centipede and zoysia lawns can lead to increased brown patch and winter kill. Also, nitrogen applications during this time have a greater potential for leaching or movement into nontarget areas.

Soil Sampling and Liming

Winter is an excellent time to collect soil samples and submit them for analysis.

Samples should be a composite of soil collected from 3 to 4 inches deep at various places around the lawn. Reduce the sample to about a pint of soil and take it to the LSU AgCenter Extension Service office in your parish or to a participating garden center. Make sure to specify the type of grass

you are growing on the soil test form.

Soil samples submitted to the LSU AgCenter cost only \$10, but they provide a wealth of information concerning the overall fertility of your soil.

If results of the soil test indicate the soil pH is too acidic, lime will be prescribed in the soil test recommendations. Winter is the best time to apply lime so it can be fully activated by the following spring. The correct soil pH is extremely important and has everything to do with nutrient availability to your lawn's roots and to fertilizer performance.

Turf Establishment

Postpone any permanent warm-season turfgrass establishment from seed until next spring.

Sod, such as St. Augustine and centipede grasses, can be laid during winter and established successfully during the spring. But remember to keep it moist to prevent it from drying out and dying.

Even establishment of sod is easiest, however, when sodding is delayed until the middle of spring, well after spring green-up.



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used for winter broadleaf control in all southern turfgrasses this time of the year.

Since weed-and-feed products usually contain high levels of nitrogen fertilizer, application should be delayed until the appropriate times for applying nitrogen-containing fertilizers for your area. (See article about brown patch above for recommendations about timing of fertilizer application.) Weed-and-feed products can be substituted as your first application of fertilizer during the early spring.

Brown Patch

Brown patch disease can come and go throughout the winter if the weather is mild.

Treatment with fungicides containing myclobutanol, propiconazole, pyraclostrobin, thiophanate-methyl



and triticonazole will reduce the spread of brown patch. In addition, azoxystrobin is now available as granular fungicide. Azoxystrobin is one of the best fungicides on brown patch disease.

Damage from brown patch will slow spring green-up, and affected areas will remain unsightly until warmer spring weather conditions help with turfgrass recovery.

Lawns may show signs of green-up in southern Louisiana in late February. Do not push turfgrass growth with fertilizer at that time. Fertilizer applied too early will feed winter weeds and will result in lush turfgrass growth that is more susceptible to injury from late frosts or brown patch. Lawns may be fertilized in the New Orleans area by late March, but delay fertilizing areas north of Baton Rouge until early to mid-April.

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

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