Horticulture Hints

Winter 2005-2006

LSU AgCenter Research & Extension

Landscape Gardening and Ornamentals

Louisiana Master Gardener Program

The Louisiana Master Gardener Program, an educational program of the LSU AgCenter, offers the public a wonderful combination of horticultural training and leadership opportunities. Participants not only become better gardeners, but they learn how to help the public with gardening needs.

Classes are offered in 20 parishes, with 42 parishes benefiting from Master Gardener volunteer involvement. Classes offer 40-50 hours of instruction in a variety of interesting topics. As a Master Gardener, you will learn about insects and diseases, ornamental plants, fruits and vegetables, diagnosing plant problems and leadership development. After completion of the course, participants are asked to volunteer by assisting with the parish's Extension horticultural education program.

The Master Gardener Program is based on volunteer service within the community. Volunteers do make a difference as they recommend research-based gardening information at community events, parish fairs, plant clinics, school programs, garden shows and civic meetings. Citizens throughout the state are experiencing the satisfaction of being Louisiana Master Gardener volunteers. For more information, contact your parish LSU AgCenter office and visit www.lsuagcenter.com "Lawn & Garden" Master Gardener Program.

Bob Souvestre

All-America Selection Winners

Bedding Plant Award Winners

(Grown during the cool season in Louisiana, from October to April/May)

Dianthus F1 'Supra Purple' (*Dianthus interspecific* 'Supra Purple') bloomed early and exhibited exceptional garden performance, including heat tolerance and prolific bloom. The 1 1/2-inch single purple flowers are lacy, with highly fringed petal edges. In full sun, 'Supra Purple' will reach 12 inches tall with an upright bouquet habit spreading 10 inches. 'Supra Purple' flowers can be cut for fresh arrangements or enjoyed in the garden during the long flowering period

Nicotiana F1 'Perfume Deep Purple' (*Nicotiana* x *sanderae* 'Perfume Deep Purple') is named for the delicate evening fragrance and deep purple of the flowers. The single, 2- inch star-shaped flowers are produced in abundance. Plants can reach 20 inches and spread 15 to 18 inches in full sun, but the plants also perform well in part shade.

Cool-season Bedding Plant Award Winners

(Grown during the cool season from October to April/May)

Diascia F1 'Diamonte Coral Rose' (*Diascia integerimma*) is the first F1 hybrid diascia. 'Diamonte Coral Rose' is improved for early flowering, branching habit, flower production and length of bloom. The 8- to 10-inch height and 18-inch spreading habit is perfect for mixed containers where a cascading plant is desirable, or as a low edging plant in a sunny garden. The 1-inch rosy coral blooms are produced in spikes on all sides of the plant. The frost-tolerant plants can be literally covered with blooms.

Viola F1 'Skippy XL Red-Gold' (*Viola cornuta* 'Skippy XL Red-Gold') is the first *Viola cornuta* to win the prestigious AAS Award. The improved qualities are flower size, flower colors and freedom of bloom. The large, 1 1/2-inch, round flowers make the plant look like a pansy, but it's a viola. The colors on its bloom are ruby red with violet red shading below the golden yellow face containing penciling or whiskers. The strong, dense plant exhibited heat tolerance combined with winter hardiness, and these two traits result in improved freedom of bloom and length of the flowering season. When mature, the plants will spread 8 inches and remain about 6 inches tall.

Flower Award Winners

(These are all summer bedding plants grown from April/May to October)

Ornamental Pepper 'Black Pearl' (*Capsicum annuum* 'Black Pearl') is a unique ornamental pepper with pure black leaves when grown in the sun. 'Black Pearl' also describes the small, black shiny peppers borne upright on the plant, which are similar in shape to pearls. The vigorous plants are quite heat tolerant and will grow to 18 inches tall, spreading about 12 to 16 inches. 'Black Pearl' is easy to grow without serious disease or insect problems. Use 'Black Pearl' plants as the centerpiece in a container with other mixed annuals. The peppers turn red when mature and are edible but fiery hot!

Salvia 'Evolution' (*Salvia farinacea* 'Evolution') expands the color range of *Salvia farinacea*. The 6- to 7-inch flower spikes are violet, distinctly different from

the typical blue. 'Evolution' will grow 16 to 24 inches tall and spread 16 to 19 inches. Gardeners who search for plants with minimal maintenance should reserve space for 'Evolution.' Irrigation is the only requirement for 'Evolution' to flower consistently. Water efficiency tests in Colorado show *Salvia farinacea* plants are drought tolerant. 'Evolution' plants are undemanding, with few disease or pest problems.

Zinnia F1 'Zowie! Yellow Flame' (*Zinnia elegans* **'Zowie! Yellow Flame')** will wake up any garden with flowers that burn with color. 'Zowie! Yellow Flame' begins a new class of semi-tall zinnias with a novel bicolor pattern. Each 3- to 4-inch semi-double bloom contains a scarlet/rose center with yellow petal edges. The color combination is uniformly intense, like a yellow flame. Expect flowering plants in eight to 10 weeks from sowing seed. In a sunny garden, mature plants will reach 24 to 29 inches tall, spreading 26 to 27 inches. The zinnia flowers are excellent as cut flowers.

Vegetable Award Winners

(These two vegetables are best grown in the cool-season garden from October to April/May.)

Carrot F1 'Purple Haze' (*Daucus carota* 'Purple Haze') is the first imperator-shaped purple carrot. The 10- to 12-inch smooth purple carrots taper to a point and reveal a bright orange center when cut. AAS Judges noted the sweet flavor during taste tests. The best presentation of 'Purple Haze' carrots will be when used raw, since cooking will dissolve the purple. The vigorous upright plants will reach 14 to 16 inches tall and spread the same distance. Only normal carrot growing conditions are needed to produce an abundance of 'Purple Haze' carrots. Grow 'Purple Haze' carrots in large containers, with herbs such as parsley and sage. 'Purple Haze' carrots can be harvested in about 70 days from sowing seed.

Cilantro 'Delfino' (*Coriandrum sativum* 'Delfino') is an improved aromatic, edible herb that really looks different from typical cilantro. It has fine fernlike foliage that is more decorative than other coarse-leaved cilantros, yet has a rich cilantro flavor. 'Delfino' is easy to grow, and leaves can be harvested in four to five weeks. When grown in full sun, mature plants can be 20 inches tall. 'Delfino' can be grown in containers on patios or decks with annuals or other herbs. The plants will eventually flower and go to seed. Harvest when the seeds have turned from green to brown and you will have the spice, coriander, which can be used in many ethnic recipes.

(These two vegetables are best grown during summer, May to November.)

Pepper F1 'Carmen' (*Capsicum annuum* 'Carmen') is a beautiful, improved Italian type of sweet pepper. Earliness is important, and 'Carmen' is a week earlier than comparisons. The distinctive horn-shaped peppers have wide shoulders, tapering to a smooth point. The upright plant reaches 28 inches tall and spreads 16 inches – a perfect size for a patio container. Tasting 'Carmen' assures you of the reason it won an AAS Award. The flavor is very sweet when ripe red, whether raw or cooked. 'Carmen' is widely adaptable because it is early maturing and productive in a wide temperature range. Unusually sweet, delicious peppers can be harvested early. Expect ripe peppers about 75 days from transplanting.

Pepper F1 'Mariachi' (*Capsicum annuum* 'Mariachi') won because of superior fruit size, improved earliness, marvelous yield and unusually fine flavor. It is an improved cone-shaped mildly "hot" (500 to 600 Scoville heat units) chile pepper. Fruit can become more pungent when plants are stressed by hot weather or lack of water. This is a fleshy pepper that ripens from yellow to red, but it will mostly be used in the yellow stage. The vigorous, attractive 18- to 24-inch plants set fruit continuously throughout the growing season. 'Mariachi' produces an abundance of 3- to 4-inch peppers when grown in gardens or in containers. Harvest can begin within 65-68 days from transplanting. The fruits lend themselves to a wide variety of dishes including salsas and sauces, or stuff, grill and enjoy.

Avoid Landscaping Practices That Encourage Termites

While fall is an excellent time for adding hardy trees, shrubs and ground covers to the landscape, it is also a time to be cautious about creating problems that could bring termites into your home. LSU AgCenter experts suggest the following to reduce the possibility of termite problems.

Place gutters and slope your landscape beds so that 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.

Spring-flowering Trees Brighten Landscapes

Flowering trees will add so much color and beauty to our landscapes over the next few months, and now through early March is an excellent time to plant these and other types of trees.

The Taiwan flowering cherry (*Prunus campanulata*) blooms in late January or February. The attractive flowers are vibrant, deep pink and are produced in great abundance before the leaves emerge. This is one of the few flowering cherries that grows and blooms reliably this far south. The 'Okame' flowering cherry is another type that will grow successfully in Louisiana, and is especially recommended for north Louisiana because it blooms later and the flowers are less likely to be damaged by a freeze. Pale pink flowers are produced in March or April.

The Oriental magnolia (*Magnolia* x *soulangiana*) is one of the most spectacular of the spring-flowering trees because its flowers are so large. Unlike the evergreen Southern magnolia, the Oriental magnolia is deciduous and loses its leaves in winter. Appearing before the foliage in February, the fragrant flowers are tulip shaped, 4 to 6 inches across and may be flushed pale pink to purple on the outside and white on the inside. Long-lived and reliable, Oriental magnolias grow 15 to 20 feet tall and need a sunny, well-drained location.

The related star magnolia (*Magnolia stellata*) is smaller, growing 10 to 12 feet tall, and is more shrub-like. The white or pale pink flowers are star shaped and wonderfully fragrant. Blooming in late January or February before the foliage, the star magnolia is an excellent choice for small gardens.

The native silver bell (*Halesia diptera*) is a lovely tree that produces small four-petaled white flowers that hang down in large numbers from the branches. The thin leaves allow light to filter through, creating a lovely effect under the tree. Silver bells thrive in Louisiana and, once established, grow rapidly, maturing at about 25 to 30 feet. They grow well with light shade or in full sun.

The hawthorns are a wonderful group of native trees that provide spring bloom as well as fruit for human or wildlife consumption. Growing 15 to 20 feet tall, the parsley hawthorn (*Crataegus marshallii*) is an excellent choice in patio or small plantings. The clusters of white flowers appear in March or April and are soon followed by the foliage, which looks like flat Italian parsley. The small red fruit that ripen in fall are relished by mockingbirds. Parsley hawthorn is tolerant of poorly drained soils and grows in full sun to part shade.

The American fringe tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*) produces clusters of flowers with long, narrow, greenish white petals that are produced in masses all along the branches. The narrow petals and hanging habit give the flowers a fringe or beard-like appearance. In the wild, you usually see them growing on the edge of the woods; they thrive in full sun to partial shade in well-drained locations. The Chinese fringe tree (*Chionanthus retusus*) also grows well here and is even showier than our native species.

Another excellent spring-flowering tree is the redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), which usually blooms in late February or March. Small, pinkish purple pea-like flowers are produced in unbelievable profusion along the branches (and even on the trunk!) before the leaves appear. This habit of blooming before the leaves grow out is fairly common among the spring-flowering trees and really adds to the impact of the flowers. Redbuds are relatively fast growing once established and prefer full sun and a well-drained location.

Yellow Leaves Are Not Always a Problem

Yellow leaves commonly show up on a wide variety of shrubs from fall through spring. Although the condition may look alarming, in most cases the yellowing leaves do not indicate a problem.

Here in the Deep South, we tend to use a large number of broad leaf evergreen trees and shrubs in our landscapes. These plants, such as gardenia, azalea, Southern magnolia, cherry laurel, Indian hawthorn, camellia, hollies, ligustrum, sweet olive, banana shrub, cleyera, viburnum and others, do not lose all of their leaves during winter and are green year round. This allows our landscapes to look green and attractive, even in the depths of winter.

Leaves on these plants do, however, eventually grow old, die and are dropped from the plant. Before old leaves drop, they often turn bright yellow, orange or red. Note that the affected leaves are generally the ones located farthest from the ends of the branches. As many as one-third of the leaves on a plant may be dropped at one time, but the amount of leaf drop varies greatly from year to year.

This dropping of old, worn-out leaves generally occurs sometime between November and May, depending on the type of plant. Gardenias yellow and drop older leaves in October and again in spring; azaleas generally drop leaves in December and January. Hollies yellow and drop leaves in March or April, just as or before new growth appears, and gardenias and Southern magnolias yellow and drop leaves in April or May.

Pruning Roses

In Louisiana, roses are generally pruned twice a year – the last week in January (south Louisiana) to mid February (north Louisiana) and again in late August to early September. The classic pruning technique for hybrid teas and grandifloras encourages the production of high quality flowers with long stems for cutting. This involves rather hard pruning, back to 18 to 24 inches in the late winter and 24 to 30 inches in the late summer. Currently, recommendations are more relaxed and involve less severe pruning. Floribundas, polyanthas shrub roses, miniatures and old garden roses require only moderate pruning to shape them and remove dead wood.

Roses are pruned primarily to: 1) remove dead wood, 2) stimulate new growth, 3) control size and shape. Cut the bush back to the desired height (usually 2 to 3 feet for hybrid teas and grandifloras). Remove all dead wood, diseased canes and twiggy growth. Cut each remaining cane back to just above a bud (preferably facing away from the middle of the bush).

Some rose cultivars (ramblers, some climbers and some old garden roses) bloom prolifically in the spring and early summer and then stop. These roses bloom on growth they made the summer before and generally are not as popular as repeat blooming roses that bloom all summer. They should be pruned, as needed, in early to mid summer soon after they finish their bloom season. Do not prune them now or you will reduce or eliminate flowering this spring.

Checklist for December/January/February

1. Daffodils can be planted through December. Excellent cultivars are Ice Follies, Fortune, Carlton and Unsurpassable.
2. Remove old flowers from your cool-season bedding plants to extend blooming and improve flower performance.
3. Plant gladiolus in late February in south Louisiana. Prolong the blooming season by planting at two- to three-week intervals for a couple of months.
4. Mulch rose beds to get plants off to a good spring start and minimize weed problems.
5. Watch azaleas in February for lacebugs. They cause the foliage to have numerous small white spots and feed underneath lower foliage. Control with horticultural oil sprays or Orthene.
6. A late winter planting of petunias will provide a good flower show for early spring. Consider the new 'Wave' series.
7. 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.
8. February is the ideal time to fertilize healthy trees.
9. January and February are good months to prune landscape trees and any deciduous and evergreen plants that don't flower in the spring.
10. Clean and sharpen tools before you put them away. 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.

Dan Gill, Allen Owings and Anthony Witcher

Fruits and Nuts

Hurricane Recovery

Deciding if trees are still basically healthy following the storm is the first step. Healthy trees that did not suffer major structural damage will generally recover if first aid measures are made.

Suggestions are provided to assist fruit and pecan growers in evaluating damage and selecting possible corrective measures. Common types of damage include flooding, leaf loss, broken limbs and fallen trees.

Peaches, plums and kiwis are very sensitive to flooding; a week of saturated soils will likely kill them. Plants that survived the flooding will maintain their green leaves or will probably produce new growth if the leaves were blown off. If the new growth wilts and dies after a few weeks, the root system is probably dead.

Some of the floodwater along the coast may have contained salt. Soil concentrations of 3,000 ppm soluble salt will make fruit culture very difficult. Grapes, figs, pomegranates and pecans are more salt tolerant and will not be hurt as readily as blackberries, blueberries and strawberries. If soil salt concentration is high, frequent irrigation or rainfall will help reduce the buildup of salt after evaporation and may leach the salt away from the root zone. LSU AgCenter personnel and others are examining the affected areas. Winter rains could eliminate much of the problem.

High sodium levels can cause internal drainage problems in the soil. The addition of gypsum to the soil at the rate of 2 ounces per square foot (2 3/4 tons per acre) should somewhat help to correct the problem. The gypsum should be moved into the soil by irrigating immediately after application.

Trees that are uprooted have been stood up immediately in sandy or very soft soils in hurricane recovery work in Florida with some success. Uprighting trees in tight clay or drier soils might damage the roots still intact in the ground and the roots may not be able to maintain the remaining foliage. It may be better to wait until the trees go dormant and upright the trees then.

Trees that have toppled have a reduced root system and will be prone to toppling in future storms for several years until the root system is reestablished.

Because of the extensive damage to the root system to partially uprooted trees, a moderate to large amount of the tree canopy should be removed. Reducing tree canopy reduces the amount of water loss and lightens the tree so that it is easier to upright the tree and also reduces the stress on the remaining attached roots. Toppled trees should be pruned back to sound wood. Some trees may need to be pruned back to main scaffold limbs or trunks. Use caution when pruning toppled trees. There may be some root tension on the trunk, and it may snap back toward the original position if a lot of weight is removed.

Heavy-duty slings or ropes should be used when trying to upright trees. Do not use chains or cables; these might injure the cambium layer of the trunk.

Trees that have their leaves blown off will probably put out a new flush of growth before winter. They may even bloom, especially if the plants were in a drought situation before the hurricane. New foliage production can use up tree carbohydrate reserves; this reduces cold hardiness. New growth in the fall can also produce succulent wood that is susceptible to sudden freezes. It will probably be spring before it will be known if the trees survived the storm because stressed trees with low carbohydrate reserves sometimes will not leaf out in the spring following a cold winter.

Broken limbs should be pruned to sound wood. The pruning cuts should be made to lateral buds or branches when possible.

Plan for Home Fruit Planting in December

December is the ideal time to obtain garden catalogs and select fruit and nut plants to grow. Use caution; it is easy to get carried away with the pictures and descriptions and to want one of everything. A fruit planting is a long-term project. The most common mistake made by most homeowners is to overextend themselves and plant too many high- maintenance fruit species. Most homeowners are not adequately equipped to spray for insects and diseases. Selecting fruit types with few pest problems or selecting varieties with resistance to known pests can reduce labor and reduce pesticide applications.

Neighbors, magazines, garden centers, libraries and mail order catalogs can be good sources of information for growing fruit. Unfortunately it can sometimes be overwhelming with all the different varieties of plants available and sometimes conflicting information being provided. Varieties that have few disease or insect problems in one location may have serious problems in other locations. The LSU AgCenter publication 1884, "The Louisiana Home Orchard," can help in choosing fruit varieties for Louisiana. It lists recommended fruit varieties for Louisiana and provides growing information. The publication is available online at www.lsuagcenter.com.

February, Ideal Time to Fertilize Fruit and Plants

Late February to early March is an ideal time to fertilize fruit plants in the home orchard. An annual application of fertilizer is critical to the maintenance of healthy, productive fruit trees and plants. The plants must achieve sufficient growth each season to replenish the root reserves exhausted the previous year.

The leaves produce carbohydrates and other food materials required in the development of fruit through photosynthesis. When the plant is underfertilized, it produces fewer leaves and fruit production is limited. Yellowish or scorched leaves and a lack of shoot growth could indicate fertility problems.

Because soil conditions vary greatly, particularly in urban areas, a fertilizer recommendation is only a general guide. If problems arise, contact your county agent for specific advice on fertilizing fruit plants.

Citrus trees are usually given 1 1/2 pounds of 8-8-8 fertilizer per year of tree age up to a maximum of 12 pounds. Follow with 1/2 pound of ammonium nitrate in June per year of age up to a maximum of 10 pounds.

Peaches and plums should receive 1 1/2 pounds of a complete fertilizer of 8-8-8 analysis per year of tree age, with a maximum of 8 pounds. In addition, apply 1/2 to 1 pound of ammonium nitrate fertilizer or its equivalent per year of tree age in June, particularly if the leaves are yellowish or shoot growth is inadequate.

Apples and pears require 1 pound of 8-8-8 or its equivalent per year of tree age, up to 10 pounds. Do not over fertilize pears. If soil is sufficiently fertile for a mature tree to produce 6 to 12 inches of new terminal growth yearly, do not add fertilizer. Excess fertilizer on pears will result in succulent growth that will be susceptible to fire blight.

Fig tree fertilizer requirements should be gauged by the growth made in the previous year. The shoots should grow about 12 to 18 inches each year. In general, apply 1 pound of 8-8-8 per year of tree age, with a maximum of 10 pounds

Blackberries should be fertilized twice each season, in late February or early March, and when harvest is completed. About 1/2 pound of 8-8-8 fertilizer per row foot is recommended for the first application. Add 1/2 pound ammonium nitrate per row foot after harvest.

For blueberries, use the ammonium form of nitrogen because the berries are able to use it more readily than the nitrate form. Blueberry soil should have a soil test every two years.

Do not use fertilizers containing phosphorus for blueberries unless soil tests indicate phosphorus levels are below the medium level. If the pH is below 5.0, do not use ammonium sulfate. Use a urea-based nitrogen source instead, but use a 1/2 rate.

Preparations sold for azaleas and camellias usually contain ammonium sulfate. Add 2 ounces of fertilizer, per year of age, up to a maximum of 1 pound in February, April and June.

Grapes should receive 1 to 2 pounds of 8-8-8 per vine, depending on the vigor of the vine. Overly vigorous grapes are not productive. In general, shoots about the size of a pencil are desired. Older vines seem to respond primarily to nitrogen, and a complete fertilizer may not be needed.

Pecan trees should receive 3 pounds of a complete fertilizer (8-8-8) or an equivalent amount of another complete fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter measured at 1 foot above the soil line. Later during the growing season (May or June) add an additional 1/2 pound of ammonium nitrate per inch of trunk diameter on trees that are 25 years old or older.

Grafting

Grafting is a major factor in the production of high quality fruits and nuts. Grafting allows for the propagation of thousands of plants of a variety that consistently produces high-quality fruit. Cleft and whip grafts are best used on dormant rootstocks. Bark and 4-flap (banana) grafts are made on plants that have started growth in the spring and the bark peels easily. Bark and 4-flap grafts are usually made in April and May.

Successful grafts require that the buds on the graft wood are dormant. When the buds open within a week after grafting, the graft will die. Graft wood is usually collected in January and February and stored in a plastic freezer bag in the vegetable crisper area of the refrigerator until ready to use.

John Pyzner

Vegetable Gardening

Vegetables to Plant in December . . .

Onions (transplant), shallots (sets or green transplants), lettuce, spinach, endive, escarole and cabbage (seed or transplant). Root crops and greens may be started. Cabbage, broccoli, brussels sprouts and cauliflower seed may be planted in south Louisiana coldframes or protected areas to produce transplants for spring harvest. Start shiitake mushrooms, or at least cut mushroom logs. Order seeds now for 2006 garden crops.

. . . and in January

Beets, carrots, radishes, turnips, cabbage, broccoli, mustard, spinach, kale and Irish potatoes. Seed in coldframe, hotbed, greenhouse: broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, Chinese cabbage, head lettuce, tomatoes, bell peppers and eggplants.

Transplant onions, shallots and celery. Start shiitake mushroom logs or cut logs while dormant.

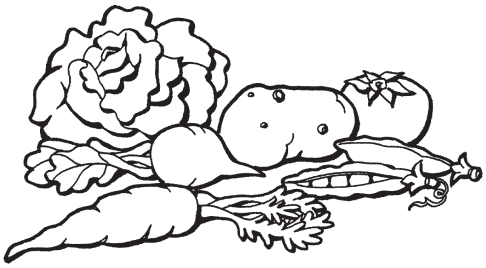
. . . and in February

Beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, turnips, mustard, spinach, parsley, Chinese cabbage, radishes, Irish potatoes, leaf lettuce, head lettuce, tomatoes, eggplants, snap beans and sweet corn in extreme south Louisiana the last part of the month.

Seed in coldframe, hotbed, greenhouse in early February: tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, cabbage, broccoli, Chinese cabbage, cauliflower and lettuce.

Transplant broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, head lettuce and shallots.

Plant seed sweet potatoes on warm (70 degrees F) raised beds.



Crop Highlights

Onions - Transplant pencil-sized onion plants from mid-December through January. Fertilize with 4 to 5 pounds of a complete fertilizer such as 8-24-24 or 13-13-13 per 100 feet of row about two weeks before transplanting. Space plants about 3 to 4 inches apart in the row. Several drills may be planted on a row with 6- to 12-inch spacing between drills.

Sidedress onions, shallots and garlic when growth starts in or early February. Use 1 pound of ammonium nitrate per 100 feet of row. Two additional sidedressings at two- to three-week intervals will increase bulb size.

Onions, shallots, leek and garlic do not compete well with weeds. To control weeds in onions, especially with post-emergence materials like Poast, make all treatments by mid-November - early December. Once cool, wet weather sets in, it's hard to control weeds. Spray onions, shallots and garlic with malathion to control thrips.

Shallots - Shallot sets can be planted any time in winter. If you have some growing in the garden, replant several as you harvest by separating plants and cutting them back and re-transplanting them. They will continue to divide and make several more plants. By doing this, you can have shallots through spring. Separate plants in December and January for next year's sets if they are crowded.

Tomatoes - December is a good time to look through seed catalogs. Recommended vine varieties are Big Beef, Champion, Terrific, Monte Carlo, First Lady, Hawaiian Hybrid, Better Boy, Jet Star (low acid) and Pink Girl. Recommended bush types are Bingo, Sunleaper, Carnival, Celebrity, Daybreak, Merced, Mountain Spring, Mountain Spring, Spitfire, Summer Flavor 6000, Sunbeam, and Sanibel. Other varieties are Crimson Plum, Spectrum 882, Niagra Belle, Mountain Belle, Jolly, Cherry Grande, Sweet Chelseas and Macero II Roma. Some newer cherries are Jolly Elf, Navidad, Saint Nick and Santa Claus. Nurseries and garden centers are encouraged to handle some of the newer varieties. Try some of the heirloom tomato varieties and BHN 640 or Amelia as spotted wilt virus resistant tomatoes. Order early before they sell out.

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, Platinum Dynasty, Solid Blue 870, Gourmet, Cheers, Bayou Dynasty, Blue Thunder, Vantage, Fortuna, Quisto, A&C #5+, A&C #5 and Rio Verde. A&C #5 is the hardiest. For reds, try Cardinal, Red Dynasty or Red Rookie.

Bolting in cabbage often occurs in Louisiana. Bolting is caused by exposure of plants to daily temperatures of around 45 degrees F and lower for several weeks. Flower stalks may not show until heads begin to form.

These cole crops will usually produce well in Louisiana in the spring, but time is important, especially with cauliflower and broccoli. They need to be planted early enough to produce before temperatures get too high.

Each of these vegetables can be planted directly in the field in January, but cauliflower and Chinese cabbage should not be transplanted out until February.

Irish Potatoes - Begin planting Irish potatoes around mid-January in south Louisiana and around 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 4 to 5 pounds of 8-24-24 per 100 feet of row before planting. Sidedress with 1 pint of ammonium nitrate when plants are 8 inches tall.

Cut seed potatoes into blocky pieces that weigh about 1 1/2 to 2 ounces each or are about the size of an egg. Be sure each seed piece has at least one eye; this is where the plant will originate. Place cut side down. Irish potato plants may be nipped back by a light frost, but damage is usually not serious, and new growth will be produced. Plant seed pieces 10 to 15 inches apart in the row. Seven to 8 pounds of seed potatoes will plant 100 feet of row.

The red skin varieties recommended for Louisiana are: Red LaSoda, LaRouge, Fontenot and Norland. LaChipper, LaBelle, Norchip, Atlantic, Kennebec and Sebago are recommended white skin varieties. Generally Red LaSoda and Kennebec are the most readily available.

LaBelle is a white, smooth skin variety released by the LSU AgCenter. It combines a high-yielding ability with excellent chipping and cooking quality. Fontenot, a high-yielding red skin variety, is the most recent released by the LSU AgCenter.

Miscellaneous

Transplant Production

Seed of cole crops such as cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower will germinate satisfactorily in cool soils (temperatures 45 to 50 degrees F). They germinate more quickly at higher soil temperatures. After germination, grow plants at 70 to 80 degrees F for eight to 10 weeks for best results.

Tomatoes, peppers and eggplant seed germinate best at soil temperatures of 65 to 75 degrees F. Grow transplants at 65 to 75 degrees F during the day and 60 to 65 degrees F at night. Temperatures much lower than this will slow, and possibly stunt, peppers and eggplants.

A common problem is not having enough light to develop a stocky transplant, especially in a window or inside a house. Provide full sunlight all day when seedlings first appear. If light is low, keep plants cooler and drier.

Tom Koske and
Jimmy Boudreaux

Turfgrass and Lawns

December starts a bleak time for warm-season turfgrasses. Most will be dormant or close to that stage. Fertilizing permanent warm-season grass now makes no sense and can get nitrogen into our groundwater. Stimulating winter growth of permanent grass with nitrogen will lead to extra winter kill and brown patch disease. If you haven't tested your soil in the past several years, do it now.

To test your soil, bring in 1 pint of soil to your parish LSU AgCenter office. This sample should be a composite of soil plugs taken from several areas 4 inches deep and mixed together. Lime soon if your tests says you need it.

In winter, use 2 to 3 pounds of ammonium nitrate or equivalent per 1,000 square feet every four to six weeks to maintain desired growth and color in overseeded rye and other winter grasses. Postpone any permanent turfgrass establishment from seed until late spring, but lay sod now if necessary, don't let it get real dry. Establishment is best left until well after spring green-up. Overseed thin or bare areas with rye to check mud and erosion. If you set out freshly cut sod this fall or winter, its lack of roots may require extra attention to watering if dry.

Be aware that brown patch disease can come and go all winter if weather is mild and grass starts growing. A treatment of fungicide containing thiophanate, azoxystrobin, propiconaxole, iprodione or PCNB will check its spread. Also labeled are captan, mancozeb, triadimefon, maneb and several others. This is important for good spring green-up. If brown patch kills your grass now, it will still be dead in spring.

Warm-season lawn grass may show signs of regrowth in south Louisiana in late February. Don't push the season by forcing early growth with fertilizer. If put on too early, it will feed the winter weeds. If put on too heavily, it will create a lush growth that will be sensitive to late frost and brown patch. Let the grass awaken gradually and show definite activity before you fertilize.

If you overseeded a cool-season grass like rye, you will need to fertilize every four or five weeks to keep up growth and color. Irrigate your dormant lawn only if it's extremely dry.

Tom Koske

Please contact your parish agent for additional information.

Agents: Enter contact information here

Visit our Web site: www.lsuagcenter.com

LSU AgCenter Research & Extension

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

Horticulture Hints

Winter 2005-2006

LSU AgCenter
Research & Extension

Visit our Web site:
www.lsuagcenter.com

Prepared quarterly by:

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

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

Thomas J. Koske

Tom Koske, Horticulture Specialist