

A row of *Camellia sasanqua* in bloom creates a stunning visual, with the fallen petals providing a profusion of pink to cover the ground. Photo by Damon Abdi

Cool Season Conundrums: To Do, or Not to Do?

With colder weather on the horizon, many of us are caught somewhere between savoring the last of our warm season plantings and yearning to get back into the yard next spring. Visions of a vibrant garden may seem confined to the spring, summer and fall; however, the decisions made during the winter months can have a major impact, both immediately, and in due time. Choosing plants with peak performance during winter months, providing proactive protection from winter elements, and sometimes doing absolutely nothing can help you achieve a landscape you can enjoy all year round.

With many factors to consider, this article offers two things to do and two things not to do.

continued on Page 3

Vegetable Gardening in Winter



Stop shopping and get into the garden. Wait ... don't stop shopping yet! While ordering online gifts and visiting local shops, go ahead and stock up on spring vegetable seed before all the fun varieties are sold. Vegetable seed makes great stocking stuffers and ensures you are ready for spring. Meanwhile, get out of the shopping center and into the garden. Cold weather is great for vegetable planting and harvesting.

Mulch

How are your mulch levels? Weeds grow in hot and cold weather and will come in thick if you aren't managing them with mulch, herbicides or cultivation. Mulch needs to be at least 2-3 inches thick. Herbicides can be used but need to be labeled for edible crops. A great example is sethoxydim (active ingredient) to kill grasses in broadleaf crops.

Fertilize

Don't forget to fertilize. Plants need nutrients even when it's cold outside. Fertilize right before planting and again on winter crops two to three weeks after planting and again two to three weeks after that with a nitrogen fertilizer about 4-6 inches from the base of the plants.

Pest Control

Watch for insects. Worms and snails are the most prevalent pests in the wintertime. Baits can be applied in the early evening for best results for snails, and sprays and dusts can control worms. Again, only use insecticides labeled for vegetable crops. Insecticide examples include *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) and bifenthrin for worm control.

continued on Page 2

Drip Irrigation

Drip irrigation can be purchased at specialty irrigation stores and at most retail garden centers. Just be sure that wherever you buy your irrigation parts from, you can easily get back there in case returns are needed. While most brands are similar, some don't quite fit with one another.

Monthly Garden Tips

December

- Scout lettuce, strawberries and all cole crops for insects. Aphids, slugs, snails and worms tend to cause problems in the winter garden. Insecticides such as horticulture oil, insecticidal soap and bifenthrin products (Ortho Bug B Gon Max) work great for aphid control. Insecticides that kill worms and loopers include Sevin, Bt (Dipel) and Spinosad. Snails and slugs are best controlled with baits. Iron phosphate baits are safest for pets. Early evening is when these pests feed. You want the baits to smell strong so apply baits in the early evening for best results. If you have a lot of slug and snail problems, remove mulch from around the base of plants. This gives them fewer hiding spaces.
- Till and hip rows in the garden now for January planted crops. Early January can be very wet.
- Plant onion sets. Choose sets that are the size of a pencil or thinner. Thicker plants tend to bolt in cold weather and set seed rather than forming bulbs.
- Order spring vegetable seed now if you want the first pick of the great varieties. Wait too long and other gardeners will order all the good varieties.
- Cover blooming strawberry plants when temperatures drop below 32 F. If the plants are not in bloom, there is no need to cover them.



Aphids: David Cappert, Bugwood.org



Covered strawberry plants: LSU AgCenter photo

January

- Onions can be planted from mid-December to early January. In early January, continue to plant onion sets. Bulbing onion varieties that perform well include but are not limited to Texas Grano, Mr. Buck, Texas 1015Y, Pinot Rouge, Red Burgundy and Miss Megan.

Now onto your favorite topic: Planting vegetable crops. Let's never get so discouraged by the weather that we don't plant our gardens. The fall and winter months are a lot less challenging than the spring in terms of managing insects and disease. So, get out there and have fun! The garden should be your place to connect with nature and let the stress of the rest of life go away for a bit of time.

- From the middle of January through the end of February you can transplant broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, chard, kale and lettuce into the garden. You can also direct seed carrots, radish turnips and other rooting vegetable crops.



Broccoli: Stock photo

- Mid-January through mid-February, plant Irish potatoes in the garden. Cut the potatoes a few days before planting. Cut larger potatoes into quarters and smaller potatoes in half. This larger size helps reduce rot. It doesn't matter which direction the potato pieces face. They will grow.
- Vegetable growers in south Louisiana should start their tomato, eggplant and pepper transplants mid-January. North Louisiana vegetable growers should wait until the end of January or the beginning of February. It takes between eight and 10 weeks to germinate and grow into a decent sized tomato, pepper and eggplant seedling for the garden. Keep seedlings in a warm and bright area. One week prior to transplanting, move the seedlings outside to harden off.

February

- Continue to transplant broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, chard, kale and lettuce transplants into the garden. Successive planting a portion of a row or a new row every two weeks ensures a steady harvest.
- Direct seed beets, turnips, mustard, parsley, radishes, lettuce, snap beans and Irish potatoes.
- Pull winter weeds. Hand pull or cultivate with a tiller or hoe. Get weeds out of the garden. Small insects such as thrips like to hide now and get your spring crops later. Preemergent herbicides like Dual and Treflan are wonderful technology that can make gardening easier, especially in larger gardens. Use Poast or other herbicides with the active ingredient sethoxydim to kill grasses not broadleaf weeds.
- Leave space for spring crops, which will go into the garden in March and April. If you have not pulled up rows, be sure to get it done at the first chance of dry weather.



Pulling weeds: Stock photo

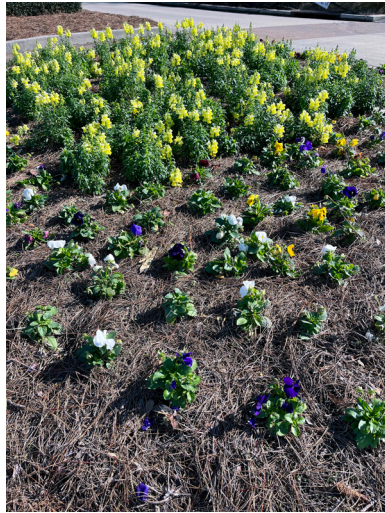
Kathryn Fontenot, Ph.D.
Extension Vegetable Specialist

continued from Page 1

Do:

Consider Plants That Peak in Winter

Woody perennials offer features you can count on year after year. Your mind may go to the stunning flower displays of camellias (*Camellia sasanqua* and *japonica*) that provide blooms at different stages of winter or the sweet scent of *Osmanthus fragrans* emanating from the inconspicuous blooms. It wouldn't be winter if we didn't have boughs of holly since the red fruit of *Ilex* sp. adorns doors as a decorative wreath and is adored in the landscape this time of year. Cool-season annuals offer a splash of color. Snapdragons (*Antirrhinum*) can provide a burst of yellow in an upright form, while violas provide color in a lower, more mounded form with the yellow, white and purple hues matching quite well with the yellow snapdragons. Ornamental kale, cabbage and other Brassicas bring a nice texture to the landscape bed, offering unique foliage to complement flower and color schemes.



The yellow blooms of snapdragons (*Antirrhinum*) add a burst of color in an upright form, complementing the purple, white and yellow violas that grow with a more mounded form. It is a perfect color combination for football season. Photo by Damon Abdi

Mulch

Mulching provides a plethora of benefits to the landscape including weed suppression, uniform aesthetics and an evaporative barrier; however, moderating soil temperatures makes winter mulching so valuable. Research at the Hammond Research Station shows that even just 2 inches of pine straw creates more stable soil temperatures during the cool season, keeping the rootzone temperature from rising or falling too fast when cold nights and warm days are engaged in their delicate springtime dance. While it may not seem like much, a little mulch can go a long way in protecting plants through cold conditions.

Do not:

Prune Spring-Flowering Plants

While winter pruning has some benefits (it can be easier to see which branches to cut when deciduous leaves drop), caution must be exercised when deciding which plants to prune. It is recommended that you do not prune spring-flowering plants during winter. Spring-flowering plants develop flower buds during the preceding summer and fall, meaning that winter pruning will remove branches that would abound with springtime blooms. Instead, wait until after your springtime bloomers cease to flower before engaging in pruning. Of course, removing any of the four "D" branches (dead, dying, diseased or damaged) can be done at any time. Ornamental grasses provide an important habitat for wildlife during winter. Gulf Coast muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) offers early fall interest with the pink tufts of flowers before becoming masses of faded foliage. Consider delaying cutting back the foliage of ornamental grasses, such as muhly grass, closer to the start of spring. This would allow the old foliage to serve as a habitat through the cold months and allow the plant to have plenty of space for new growth with the warming spring temperatures.

Remove Leaf Litter

One of the simplest things you can do to support a healthy landscape is to let leaf litter lie. AgCenter publication [P3949 Leave it Be: Maintaining Leaf Litter in the Landscape](#) highlights the benefits of maintaining this natural mulch, as many important insects overwinter in the leaves. From arthropods acting as a biocontrol for pests to fireflies that light up a summer night, a healthier, more enjoyable landscape can be developed by not removing leaves. Consider not removing leaf litter.

Damon E. Abdi, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Extension Specialist,
Hammond Research Station

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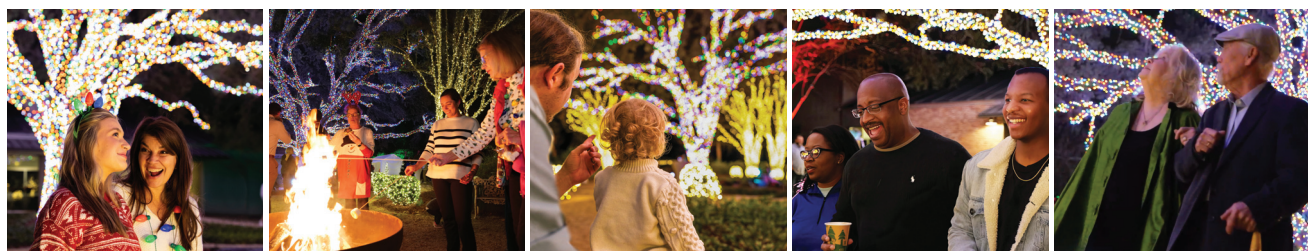
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I'm Dreaming of a Green Christmas

In my year and some change in Louisiana, I've learned what an amazing and unique state Louisiana is. One thing that makes it unique is the contrast between the northern and southern parts of the state. For anyone from Louisiana, I probably don't need to elaborate any more on that topic, so instead, I'll relate it to growing grass. Winters in New Orleans and Baton Rouge can be much different than winters in Shreveport or Monroe. Grasses up north will usually enter complete dormancy during the winter and turn straw brown, while grasses down south, depending on weather, may never truly go fully dormant. All the rules of warm-season winter dormancy are thrown out around the Interstate 10 corridor and further south. One thing we all have in common is, either way, we are all stuck looking at something less than desirable from about November into March when temperatures begin to warm enough for our warm-season grasses to begin vigorous growth again.

If you don't like looking at straw brown grass through the winter or just want to see a nice, dark green lawn during the colder months, you do have a couple of options at your disposal. One involves growing grass that enjoys the cooler weather of winter, and the other is a little more nontraditional but is gaining popularity, not just for winter but in summer, too. I'm talking about overseeding and painting. Yes, you can just paint your lawn green during the winter and summer (think drought-stressed brown grass turning instantly green). Let's look at the pros and cons of each method.

Overseeding Warm-Season Turf With Cool-Season Species

It's important to remember that there is no agronomic benefit to your warm-season grass of overseeding with another species outside of maybe reducing winter weed populations in your lawn. Perennial ryegrass, a cool-season turf, is continually being bred for better heat and drought tolerance. This means it sticks around longer in the spring, competing for resources with your warm-season turf.

Pros of Overseeding

- 1. Year-round greenery:** Overseeding ensures your lawn remains green throughout the winter when warm-season grasses like centipede and St. Augustine go dormant.
- 2. Erosion control:** Cool-season grasses help prevent soil erosion during the winter months in thin, weak stands of warm-season turf.
- 3. Weed suppression:** A dense cover of cool-season grass can suppress winter weeds, reducing the need for herbicides.

Cons of Overseeding

- 1. Increased maintenance:** Overseeding requires additional care, including watering (depending on Mother Nature's plans), mowing (not as much as in the summer, but some may be necessary) and fertilizing. The overseeded grass is using soil nutrients that would otherwise be there for your warm-season lawn in the spring.
- 2. Potential for disease:** The introduction of cool-season grasses can sometimes lead to increased disease pressure. *Pythium* species can attack newly seeded ryegrass during periods of cool, wet weather and high humidity.
- 3. Cost:** There are costs associated with purchasing seed and additional lawn care products. And don't forget, time is money.

continued on Page 6



There is less annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*, the lime green patches on the left) in the overseeded dormant turf on the right than in the dormant turf on the left. Overseeding can help with weed suppression. Photo by Jim Brosnan, University of Tennessee

continued from Page 5

Rates of Seed

For overseeding, the recommended seeding rates are:

- **Annual ryegrass:** 10-15 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet
- **Perennial ryegrass:** 8-10 pounds per 1,000 square feet
- **Roughstalk bluegrass:** 2-3 pounds per 1,000 square feet

Remember, with these seeding rates, the heavier you apply, the more competition there is with your warm-season turf.

Watering

Proper watering is crucial for successful overseeding. Initially, water lightly but frequently to keep the soil moist until the seeds germinate. Once the grass is established, reduce the frequency but increase the depth of watering to encourage deep root growth.

Avoiding Preemergents

When overseeding, it's important to avoid using preemergent herbicides, as they can prevent the germination of your new grass seeds. Instead, focus on mechanical weed control methods and postemergent herbicides if necessary.

Lawn Painting

If overseeding seems too labor-intensive or costly and you enjoy your break from tending to the grass, lawn painting is an alternative that can provide an instant green color to your dormant lawn. Painting lawns is not necessarily a new idea. Companies have been putting green dyes and pigments in surfactants and fungicides for quite a while. It's now just becoming more accessible to homeowners.



Examples of different green hues achieved with various turf paints on dormant bermudagrass. Photo by Jared Hoyle, Kansas State University

Pros of Lawn Painting:

- 1. Instant results:** Lawn painting provides immediate green color, making it ideal for special events or quick aesthetic improvements.
- 2. Low maintenance:** Once applied, painted lawns require minimal maintenance compared to overseeded lawns.
- 3. Cost-effective:** Lawn painting can be more affordable than overseeding, especially for smaller areas.

Cons of Lawn Painting:

- 1. Temporary solution:** The paint will eventually fade and may need reapplication, especially in high-traffic areas. It may require multiple applications throughout the winter.
- 2. Staining:** If you have kids and dogs that play in the yard, clothes and fur can become stained with green pigment. Make sure the paint is completely dry, and avoid contacting the surface if it's been recently wet.

How to Paint Your Lawn:

- 1. Choose the right product:** Select a high-quality, nontoxic lawn paint specifically designed for turfgrass. Some popular brands include Endurant Turf Paint, Green Lawngr and LawnLift (just examples; not endorsing or telling you any product is better than others). Do your homework and find what product fits your budget and needs.
- 2. Prepare your lawn:** Mow the lawn to a uniform height and remove any debris. Ensure the grass is dry before applying the paint.
- 3. Mix the paint:** Follow the manufacturer's instructions to mix the paint. Typically, this involves diluting the concentrate with water.
- 4. Apply the paint:** Use a garden sprayer or a specialized lawn paint sprayer to apply the paint evenly. Work in sections to ensure complete coverage.
- 5. Drying time:** Allow the paint to dry completely before walking on the lawn. This usually takes a few hours, depending on the weather conditions.

You may also be able to find services in your area that provide lawn paint if doing it yourself seems too time-intensive or intimidating.

Conclusion

Both overseeding and lawn painting offer viable solutions for maintaining a green lawn during the winter months in Louisiana. Overseeding provides a natural, long-term approach but requires more maintenance and care. Lawn painting, on the other hand, offers immediate results with less effort but may require reapplication, depending on rainfall. By understanding the pros and cons of each method, you can choose the best approach to keep your lawn looking great all winter long.

*Eric DeBoer, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor*

Frosty Foes:

How to Outsmart Winter Lawn Weeds

As temperatures drop and lawns enter dormancy, winter broadleaf weeds can become a common nuisance in southern lawns. Weeds such as wild geranium, sow thistle, lawn burweed, dandelion, white clover and Indian mock strawberry thrive in thin turfgrass areas, germinating in late September. These winter weeds flower in late winter and early spring and are prolific seed producers, making timely control essential.

Controlling Winter Broadleaf Weeds

For effective control, a combination of preemergence and postemergence herbicide applications is recommended. Preemergence herbicides, such as dithiopyr and prodiamine, should be applied in September and repeated in November to prevent weed germination. An October application of atrazine is highly effective for southern turf species like St. Augustinegrass, centipedegrass and bermudagrass.

Postemergence herbicides can be used from November to April to tackle any weeds that have already sprouted. Atrazine combined with products like Weed B Gon or Weed Free Zone is particularly effective during this time. Other postemergence options include Trimec and metsulfuron (MSM), which work well for tough broadleaf weeds like clover and lawn burweed. Atrazine is also an excellent choice for controlling annual bluegrass.

Winter Lawn Care Tips

As lawns go dormant by December, regular fertilization should be avoided. Applying nitrogen fertilizer to dormant or semi-dormant lawns, especially St. Augustinegrass, centipedegrass and zoysia, can lead to increased susceptibility to diseases like brown patch and can also result in nitrogen leaching into nontarget areas. Most lawn fertilization should have stopped by late summer, with fertilizing resuming only in spring.

Winter is an excellent time to conduct a soil test to check for fertility issues or imbalances in soil pH. If soil pH is too acidic, lime can be applied, while sulfur is used for alkaline soils. Making these adjustments during the winter ensures they take effect by the growing season.

While seeding permanent warm-season grasses should be postponed until spring due to cold temperatures, sod, such as St. Augustinegrass or centipedegrass, can be laid in winter. Just be sure to maintain adequate moisture levels to prevent the sod from drying out.

Lastly, large patch disease, formerly known as brown patch, can persist during mild winters. Fungicides containing myclobutanil, propiconazole, or azoxystrobin can help control the spread. Left untreated, large patch can slow spring green-up and leave lawns more prone to weed infestations.

By following these tips, homeowners can keep their lawns healthy and weed-free through winter.

Mark A. Wilson
Horticulture Agent, Northwest Region

Controlling Winter Broadleaf Weeds

Ingredients

- 1 ounce Weed Free Zone or Weed B Gon
- 8.6 ounces atrazine
- 2 teaspoons spreader sticker/surfactant

Instructions

- Mix ingredients into 1 gallon of water using a pump sprayer.
- This mixture covers 1,000 square feet of lawn.

Application Tip

For best results, apply between November and April for effective control of winter broadleaf weeds in southern lawns.



Lawn burweed. Stock image



Indian mock strawberry. Stock image



Dwarf Burford
(*Ilex cornuta*).
Photo by
Maddox Miller

Plants of the Holiday Season: **Hollies**

Hollies are wonderful plants that have a festive appearance this time of year. The deep green, spiny leaves accompanying the bright red berries are some of the most iconic holiday foliage around. Botanically, hollies belong to the genus *Ilex* and are the sole members of the Aquifoliaceae plant family.

Ilex spp. are evergreen, woody perennials that have proven themselves as reliable plants in the Louisiana landscape. Some of the smaller hollies, such as dwarf yaupon and inkberry, are great alternatives to problematic boxwoods. Although most hollies are classified as shrubs, some hollies can grow much larger and may be considered trees in the landscape. Some excellent hollies which will grow into large specimens include the Burford holly, American holly and Savannah holly. These larger hollies can be utilized as stand-alone specimens or as privacy screens. Once established, hollies can exhibit a great degree of drought and heat tolerance. Most hollies performed well the past couple of summers through exceptionally hot and dry conditions.

Hollies grow best in well-draining soil with a slightly acidic pH but are tolerant

of various soil conditions including heavier clay. They are best suited to areas that receive either full sun or partial shade. As is the case with all landscape plants, be sure to choose species or cultivars for a particular space with the mature size in mind.

Ilex spp. are dioecious which means that individual plants are either male or female. The only holly plants that bear the red fruit are females. Interestingly, without male pollinizers in the vicinity, your female plant will not bear fruit. The red berries provide a food source for wildlife during the winter months. Birds can often be seen snacking on the red fruit or building nests in the canopy.

As is referenced in the popular holiday song "Deck the Halls," hollies are some of the most significant plants of the season. Hollies can be used to make wreaths or in floral arrangements. Consider planting a holly for festive foliage and red berries during the holiday season since October to February is one of the best times to plant cold hardy trees and shrubs. Deck the halls with boughs of holly, and 'tis the season to be jolly!

Maddox Miller
Associate ANR Agent

Lasting Landscapes:

Cold, Heat & Drought Tolerant Plants for Louisiana

Louisiana has had some extreme weather conditions over recent years from ice storms and untimely frosts to record breaking heat and unrelenting droughts. Drastic weather patterns like these can take a toll on our utility bills and water pipes, as well as our beloved landscape plants. While we can't control the weather, we can control what plants we choose to install to create a more resilient landscape. Here are some top performing perennials that are extremely cold hardy, as well as heat and drought tolerant. These plants aren't just tough; they are highly ornamental and treasured for their valuable landscape qualities. Use this guide when deciding which plants are best to replace those that struggle or perish in these extreme weather conditions.

Gaura

Gaura lindheimeri is a native perennial with tall wispy flowering stalks that sway in the breeze, making it a great addition to sensory gardens for its eye-catching movements. It is also perfect for pollinator gardens, attracting butterflies, hummingbirds and bees with its pinkish white butterfly-shaped flowers. Gaura has a long tap root allowing it to tolerate drought conditions which makes it a great addition to xeriscapes, or prairie gardens. Its low shrubby habit makes it great for mixed borders and cottage gardens. The foliage is attractive, sage green and semievergreen/evergreen through the winter. It tolerates different soil types and is relatively pest free. Gaura blooms



Siskiyou Pink gaura. Photo by Marcie Wilson

summer through fall and needs full sun and good drainage. Many cultivars are available and recommended for Louisiana including Sparkle White, Whirling Butterflies and Siskiyou Pink.



Stokes' aster. Photo by Marcie Wilson

Stokes' Aster

Stokesia laevis is a native perennial that is wildly underused in the landscape. Well-behaved, drought tolerant, cold hardy, showy, pollinator-friendly and relatively carefree, Stokes' aster checks all the boxes. Lavender blooms bob atop 1-foot-tall stalks rising from a basal rosette. It is evergreen in the deep south, with attractive foliage. Glossy medium-dark green lance shaped leaves have a prominent white midvein. It works great in practically all garden types: cut flower, pollinator, mixed border, cottage, prairie, wildflower and woodland. It blooms May through September and reblooms when spent flower stalks are cut back. Stokes' aster prefers moist well-drained soil but tolerates drought just fine once established. Plant in full sun, though it will tolerate light shade. This compact perennial deserves a spot in your landscape. Recommended cultivars are Blue Danube, Mary Gregory, Silver Moon, and Peachie's Pink.

Shasta Daisy

Leucanthemum x superbum, Shasta daisy, is an evergreen perennial, native to Europe. Its parentage, *L. vulgare*, also known as Oxeye Daisy, is naturalized in areas across the entire U.S. This iconic flower is a showstopper in the landscape, surviving heat, drought and dry spells with ease once established. It's a perfect contender for any Louisiana garden or flower bed. Who doesn't love a cheery and bright mass of daisies shining on a summer day? Its dense clumps of dark green scalloped foliage sails through winter without damage from frosts, freezes and temperatures as low as -20 F. Hardy shastas provide structure and greenery in the bleak winter landscape. Bloom time is May through October, adding value to an array of garden types: borders, formal and informal, cottage, perennial and meadow/prairie. Plant in full to partial sun in well-drained soil. Shasta daisies are virtually pest and disease free, attractive to butterflies and resistant to deer and rabbit. Divide clumps every three years in the spring as centers become woody, with two to three rhizomes per division. It is also a great "pass along" plant to share with others. Many cultivars are available on the market. Recommended for Louisiana are Alaska, Becky, Cobham's Gold and Snowcap.



Shasta daisies planted among barberry and Indian hawthorn. Photo by Marcie Wilson

continued on Page 10

continued from Page 9

Daylilies

Hemerocallis hybrids make up thousands of registered cultivars bred and made available to consumers. Picking the right one can be difficult given the many options in bloom color, leaf retention, fragrance and so on. Don't let that stop you from incorporating daylilies into your landscape. No matter the bloom color, size or season, daylilies are excellent performers in Louisiana's climate. Evergreen and semi-evergreen options offer visual appeal and structure in the winter landscape. Daylilies in general are hardy in zones 3-9 and typically come back year after year without fail. Daylilies are also very drought tolerant once established and are carefree, beautiful plants that tolerate different soil types. Daylily rust can be an issue during wet periods, but providing good air circulation around plants helps reduce the risk. Daylilies are grown for their large, showy flowers that come in many colors and shapes. Bloom time varies from early, mid or late season as well as repeat bloom. Plant in full to partial sun with good drainage, but full sun is best for optimum bloom. Divide every three to six years in fall or early spring to encourage more blooms. Daylilies make great additions to formal, cottage and fragrance gardens. There is a cultivar out there to meet your needs. Visit the American Daylily Society website and use the database to search by name, characteristic and registration year to view all cultivars that fit within those parameters. Chose a fragrant, evergreen, repeat

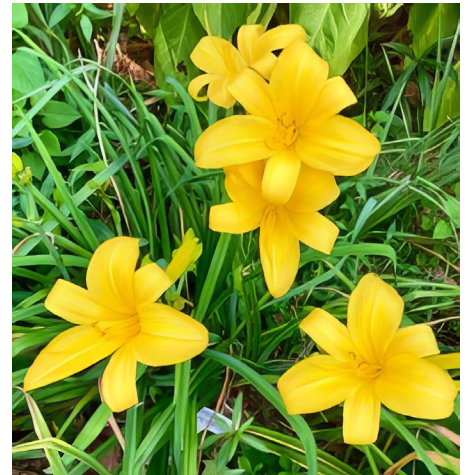
bloomer for ultimate landscape value. Cultivars recommended for Louisiana are Goldie Locks, Grape Ripple, Pretty Woman, Stella d'Oro, Joan Senior, Strawberry Candy and Pandora's Box. Cora Morace, a resident of Lake St. John in Concordia Parish, and avid daylily collector and breeder recommends Black Eyed Stella as a great alternative to the standard Stella d'Oro. It's similar in size and bloom cycle but sports an eye-catching red throat. For larger cultivars, she notes Buttered Popcorn, Fairy Tale Pink and Mauna Loa all as great performers in her gardens for their hardiness, rebloom and semievergreen to evergreen habit. "Look for evergreen or semievergreen, as some varieties, especially dormant, require more cold temps than we get in Louisiana. There are thousands of daylily varieties these days so whether you need height, color, or seasonal bloom you can probably find just the right one," Morace explains.



Strawberry Candy. Photo by Marcie Wilson



Fairy Tale Pink. Photo by Cora Morace



Buttered Popcorn. Photo by Cora Morace



A low growing, tame, mounding habit of catmint. Photo by Marcie Wilson

Catmint

Nepeta x faassenii and *N. racemosa* are two popular species of catmint that are perfect for Deep South gardens. Not to be confused with catnip, although closely related, catmint is less attractive to cats but has far more ornamental value than catnip. Like Stokes' aster, this perennial packs a punch and is very underused in the landscape. It's incredibly cold hardy, often behaving as an evergreen perennial, adding to the visual appeal of bleak winter landscapes with its silvery, gray-green foliage. In the spring and summer, it comes to life with a spray of lavender colored flowers, blooming all the way into fall. Its low growing, clumping habit makes it a popular choice for landscaping, accented nicely against roses, hibiscus, cannas, daylilies and lantana. It thrives in full sun and heat and is exceptionally drought tolerant. Other favorable attributes include aromatic foliage, resistant to deer and rabbit, pollinator friendly, low maintenance, low pest and disease issues, tolerant of various soils and highly versatile in the landscape. Recommended varieties include *N. x faassenii* Junior Walker, a sterile dwarf hybrid of the also popular *N. racemosa* Walker's Low. Other catmint species may reseed, but all will benefit from a light sheering after the first bloom cycle. Catmint is a great alternative to lavender, phlox, moss rose and verbena. It is easily propagated by division or cuttings.

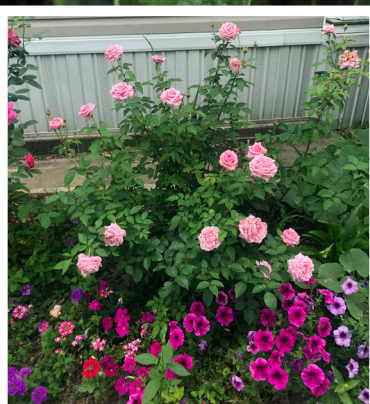
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Here are more recommended perennials for Louisiana's sometimes cold winters, occasional drought and the always persistent heat and humidity. Incorporate some or all of these into your gardens to extend the lifespan of your landscape for years or even generations to come.

- Lantana
- Rudbeckia
- Chrysanthemum
- Roses (some varieties)
- Agastache
- Verbena
- Coneflower
- Salvia
- Rosemary
- Coral bells
- Ornamental grasses
- Dusty miller
- Blanket flower

Marcie Wilson
Assistant Extension Agent
Tensas, Catahoula, Concordia, Franklin,
Madison, East Carroll parishes



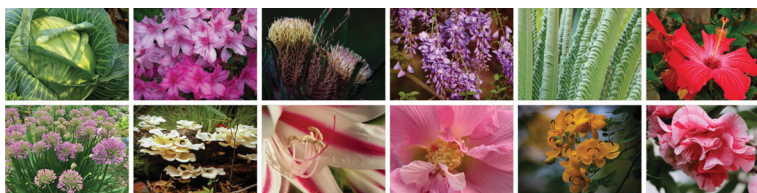
ABOVE: Bandana lantana is a hardy and showy Louisiana landscape plant. **LEFT:** Belinda's Dream rose is a Louisiana Super Plant that is fairly drought tolerant once established. Photos by Marcie Wilson

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SLIME FLUX

Bacterial wetwood, also known as bacterial flux or slime flux, is a disorder of many tree species. Some of the common trees affected include ash, birch, beech, boxelder, cottonwood, elm, fir, hickory, maple, oaks, pines, yellow poplar, sweet gum, sycamore, walnut and willow. Wetwood normally occurs in the inner wood of heartwood trees without causing any harm in response to biotic and abiotic stresses including pruning and wounding. On the contrary, wetwood colonized by facultative and obligate anaerobic bacterial species may inhibit fungal wood decay. However, the gases produced by anaerobic bacterial growth result in pressure to buildup which then forces sap from within the tree to the outside surface through cracks and wounds on the trunk. This ooze is often colonized by surface inhabiting fungi, bacteria or yeast and results in the formation of slime flux with a rancid odor that may be detected from a distance (**Figure 1**). Slime flux may appear anywhere on the tree as low as near the base (**Figure 1**) or several feet up on the trunk (**Figure 2**).

Slime flux runs down from the point of exit, leaving behind stained (**Figure 3**), discolored (**Figure 4**), water-soaked areas on the trunk. Older slime flux will dry out and can be seen in the form of opaque white crystals deposited on the trunk (**Figure 5**), whereas active slime flux can be seen bubbling out from an exit point along the tree trunk (**Figure 6**).

Although slime flux is not considered a disease, the forceful outward expulsion of sap under pressure may damage sapwood living tissue and the bark resulting in wilting of leaves, branch dieback and general decline in tree vigor. Additionally, slime flux may delay wound callus formation.

There is no preventative treatment or cure for slime flux. Adopting good horticulture practices that improve tree vigor including proper planting in well drained fertile soils, adequate fertilization, avoiding water stress, proper pruning and disinfestation of pruning tools in between trees, proper management of pest problems may help reduce the incidence of slim flux.

*Raghuwinder Singh, D.P.M.
Professor and Horticulture Pathology
Extension Specialist*



Figure 1. Slime flux ooze presents at the base of an affected Nuttall oak tree.

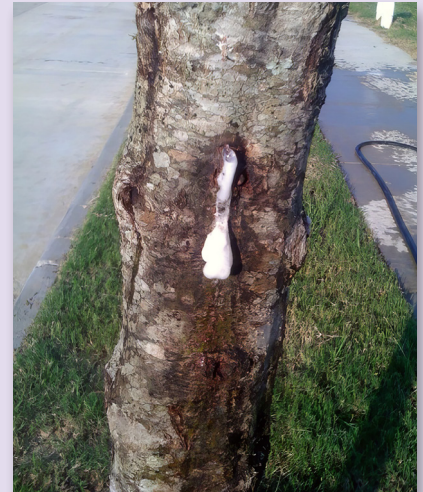


Figure 2. Slime flux ooze appears several feet up on the trunk of a Nuttall oak tree. Photos by Raghuwinder Singh



Figure 3. A tree trunk exhibiting rundown streaks left behind from the slime flux ooze from an exit point.



Figure 4. A dark discolored trunk of Nuttall oak resulting from slime flux.



Figure 5. Older dried slime flux appears as opaque white crystals deposited on the trunk of a Nuttall oak tree.



Figure 6. A Nuttall oak displaying active slime flux bubbling out from an exit point along the tree trunk.

Containers: An Easy Solution to Many Gardening Conundrums

Expansive, in-ground flowerbeds and vegetable gardens aren't for everyone.

Maybe you want to grow just a few plants – either because of limited space or a desire for a minimal gardening commitment. Or perhaps you want to dress up a courtyard, patio, deck or apartment balcony where planting directly into the ground isn't possible.

Growing in containers can solve all of these problems. It also has its share of benefits. Potted plants can easily be switched out and moved around, offering the flexibility to update your space as often as you like. You have more control over the soil you use, and containers tend to have fewer problems with weeds. And they can be moved into protected areas during freezes – a feature that is especially important for tender tropical plants and citrus trees. With containers, you have the freedom to decorate your home or office with plants, too.

What Can I Grow in Containers?

Well, just about anything – from small trees and shrubs to herbaceous perennials and annuals to herbs and vegetables. As always, you first need to think about sunlight requirements. Is the location where you will place your containers sunny, shady or somewhere in between? Indoors or out? Choose plants that will thrive in those conditions. Vegetables and flowers need a lot of sun to be most productive.

Next, consider how much space you have. Larger plants and trees will need larger containers and take up more room. They also will be hard to move unless you use planters with wheels or place them on plant dollies. Smaller plants grown in smaller containers may look out of proportion in a larger space and vice versa.

If you plan to grow vegetables in containers, know that some varieties



LSU AgCenter horticulture agent Will Afton stands with some different types of containers that can be used for gardening. Photos by Randy LaBauve

make better choices than others. Tomatoes and snap beans, for example, come in bush and vining types. Unless you can sit your containers next to a fence or other support, you'll be better off with the bush varieties.

Endless Container Options

You can use almost anything for a container. You can buy decorative ceramic planters at a garden center or simply reuse the black plastic nursery pots your plants come in. Get creative and repurpose items such as storage tubs, cartons, jugs and cans.

Lightweight plastic, fiberglass and resin containers are easier to pick up when needed. Terracotta pots are a popular, readily available choice. Because the material is porous, these containers will dry out faster.

Fabric containers are collapsible for easy storage. Some even have flaps that let

you see inside. This is a fun option if you're growing something like carrots or potatoes that develop underground.

Whatever container you use, it needs to have holes in the bottom to allow water to run out. Especially if you are using some kind of recycled household item, you may need to drill some drainage holes.

Select a container that is big enough to accommodate the plant and its root system. But don't go too big – in a container that is too large, all that extra soil will hold more moisture than a small plant can take up. This can lead to root rot and other problems.

Use 5-gallon or larger containers for vegetables such as tomatoes and peppers, which will rapidly expand from seeds or transplants into large plants. For ornamental plants, which tend to grow slower, pick a pot that is just a couple of inches bigger than the diameter of the plant.

continued on Page 15



Terracotta pots are porous and retain less moisture than those made from other materials.

continued from Page 13

Growing Media

Don't just fill your containers with a few shovelfuls of dirt out of your yard. You need to use a mix designed for containers. Buy some potting soil, which is a blend of soil, organic matter and perlite – or sometimes sand or vermiculite – that encourages good drainage.

Be wary of bulk garden soil, which is commonly mixed with mulches, compost and sand and is intended to supplement in-ground gardens. These mixes can be inconsistent in drainage, and the larger bark pieces can interfere with planting by seed.

Some people like to put a layer of gravel in the bottoms of containers to aid drainage. Unless you're using very large planters, this probably isn't necessary. If you use gravel, make sure you still have room for at least 10 to 12 inches of soil for your plants to thrive.

Leave a bit of headspace when placing soil in containers. If you fill them to the brim, the soil will wash over the edges when you water your plants.

Water Regularly

You'll probably need to water your container plants more often than those in the ground, especially in warmer weather and in sunny locations. Develop a simple watering schedule by routinely checking the soil and watering when it becomes



Containers offer the opportunity to accent indoor spaces with plants. Photos by Olivia McClure

dry to the touch. Water at the soil surface rather than overhead to help prevent foliar diseases and wait until you see water running out of the drainage holes.

Avoid overwatering. Keeping the soil saturated prevents gas exchange in the potting mix and leads to root rot. On the other hand, leaving soil dry for too long also harms plant roots.

Stay on Top of Fertilization

Potting soil generally has fertilizer mixed into it. But because the soil needs to be

watered more frequently, nutrients leach out of containers quickly.

Apply a complete, all-purpose fertilizer at planting. Look for a product containing nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) such as 10-10-10 or 20-20-20. Maintain herb and vegetable plants, which have higher fertilizer demands, with twice-monthly applications of a water-soluble nitrogen source like calcium nitrate. Organic-minded growers may use blood meal.

*Olivia McClure
Associate Communications Specialist*

School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences
Horticulture Division
155 J. C. Miller Hall - LSU
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803

Upcoming Events:

- **Nov. 2 – POSTPONED!** Seed Savers Conference, State Evacuation Shelter in Alexandria. Contact Kerry Heafner at kheafner@agcenter.lsu.edu or 318-323-2251.
- **Dec. 14 – Christmas at the Farm, family movie and visit with Santa and Mrs. Claus.** Contact Donna Haynes at dhaynes@agcenter.lsu.edu or 318-408-0971.
- **Dec. 14 – Gulf South Pawpaw Symposium, Dave Thompson Event Barn at Docville Farm in Violet.** Contact Anna Timmerman at atimmerman@agcenter.lsu.edu or 312-846-0689. The first 100 guests to sign up via Eventbrite and attend the entire symposium will receive two free pawpaw trees.
- **Jan. 29 – 2025 Landscape Trends in the Garden Seminar Virtual Meeting.** Hosted by the Louisiana Master Gardeners Program. To RSVP and receive a link to the event, email LMGCoordinator@agcenter.lsu.edu.

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School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences
155 J. C. Miller Hall - LSU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803
225-578-4070; Fax: 225-578-1068

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