



Figure 1. Plants at the Hammond Research Station were covered with frost fabric and left exposed during a winter frost to monitor their response. Photo by Damon Abdi



Winter Warm-Up: Cool-Season Coverage and Checklists

Louisiana winters are a welcome departure from the sweltering summer sun and the fleeting warmth of fall. Most years, we can comfortably garden during winter while wearing our summer attire; however, the memories of snow-covered streets (even south of Interstate 10) remain in our minds from last January. While we certainly hope to avoid similar snowfall this year (save for maybe a white Christmas), we can consider ways to protect our gardens as we put a bow on 2025.

As we wade into winter, temperatures drop, and some plants lose the “pop” that they add to the garden. Warm-season annuals may falter at first frost, signaling the conclusion of their lifespan. Tender perennials may die above ground only to resprout with warmer weather. Woody perennials may appear as solely stems, devoid of the foliage and flowers that are featured during spring, summer and fall. How might we protect our plants to set up for a successful spring?

In the Fall, Garden From Top to Bottom

Cooler temperatures don’t signal the end of the growing season in Louisiana. There are lots of vegetables you can still plant to have fresh veggies all winter long. Now is the perfect time to plant leafy greens. Remember to successively plant every week or so to ensure harvests all season long. Here are a few of my favorite leafy greens:

Lettuce: Forget about store-bought iceberg heads. Try butterhead, Boston and loose-leaf varieties.

Kale: You’re probably familiar with curly kale varieties like Winter Bor, but have you tried Lacinato or dinosaur kale? Try Mamba or Black Magic. For a bit of extra texture in your winter garden consider Red Russian.

Swiss chard: Cool-season gardens don’t have to be monochromatic. Consider adding some color to your garden with Bright Lights, Magenta Sunset or Orange Fantasia Swiss chard. Each offers showstopping, colorful stems.



Left: Now is the perfect time to plant leafy greens like this green lettuce. **Right:** Add color with varieties such as purple leaf lettuce. Photos by Christine Coker

continued on Page 2

continued on Page 2

continued from Page 1

At the Hammond Research Station, several studies seek to solve this issue. Getting to the root of the problem: Cold temperatures have a pronounced effect on plant root systems. A healthy layer of mulch can solve this issue. Recent research has demonstrated that even just 2 inches of pine straw can raise soil temperatures during the cool season, offering a little bit of insulation to get plants through the cold of winter. On a budget? Consider using locally sourced leaf litter (i.e., collect fallen leaves on your property).

While we can't see the roots, winter damage to aboveground plant parts can be very noticeable. Tractor seat plant (*Farfugium*) is a low-growing perennial where the large leaves bear resemblance to its namesake. When temperatures drop, the foliage of *Farfugium* languishes, displaying damage and an unappealing look in the landscape. Fear not, as *Farfugium* will regrow when you cut out dead foliage and temperatures warm up. Recent research investigating the use of frost fabrics as a cover for sensitive plants has yielded interesting insights to temperature dynamics during the cool-season; however, anecdotal evidence provides a unique look. On the side of the Hammond Station office, plantings of *Farfugium* were covered with frost fabric or remained exposed to winter's chill (Figure 1). After the frost passed and plants were uncovered, the difference was quite stark between those exposed to the cold and those protected (Figure 2). While there remains a lot of research to be conducted, early returns are showing that a little bit of coverage during winter can keep plants looking pretty. In any event, a spring pruning allowed the frost-damaged plants to return to their full glory.



Figure 2. Plants covered with frost fabric (foreground) fared better during a frost than those left exposed (background). Photo by Damon Abdi

Final few tips to keep your garden in good shape for winter:

1. Do not cut your ornamental grasses (i.e. muhly grass) back until **just before spring starts**. This provides an important habitat for wildlife to survive the colder months.
2. If you have water features, irrigation lines or anything containing liquid, be very aware of the temperature. You do not want prized features or pipes to become damaged from frozen water expanding.
3. Bought a bunch of plants and just haven't had time to install them yet? Try to heel-in container plants by barricading the container with mulch or soil to offer temporary insulation before spring installation. Pushing pots together tightly can also help the plants insulate each other to get through winter.

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

continued from Page 1

Mustard: Whether you're looking to add more color or texture to your vegetable patch, there is a mustard to fit the bill. Ruby Streaks, Scarlet Frills and Red Giant each offer lovely red foliage. Golden Frills and Miz America bring loads of texture to your planting.

Now that we've covered the tops of plants, let's talk about bottoms — root vegetables.

Beets: Whether you have a large or small space, there's a beet for that. Babybeet is a well-proportioned mini beet that can also be grown in containers. Touchstone Gold matures with a smooth orange skin enveloping a vibrant gold root.

Radishes: Fast growing and easy, radishes should be a staple in your cool season garden. There are so many choices like the multicolor mix of Easter Egg II or the bright red of the extra-early Rover. Asian types like the daikon Miyashige or the Korean radish Alpine are sure to bring a spicy twist to your cuisine.

Rutabagas: For an easy-going root crop for the fall garden, try Laurentian for a sweet and mild flavor or Helenor for a light orange flesh and mild flavor.

Turnips: A favorite in Southern gardens, Purple Top White Globe is the traditional American turnip. Other varieties to try include Hakurei and Hirosaki Red.

Tips for success:

- **Soil prep:** Ensure well-drained, fertile soil with compost or organic matter.
- **Spacing:** Follow recommended spacing to avoid overcrowding and disease.
- **Protection:** Use row covers or netting to protect from pests like deer, rabbits and squirrels.
- **Watering:** Most of these crops prefer consistent moisture but not soggy soil.

Fall gardening in Louisiana offers a vibrant opportunity to grow a wide array of vegetables from top to bottom. With cooler temperatures and fewer pests, it's the perfect season to plant nutrient-rich leafy greens and flavorful root crops. By choosing colorful varieties like Bright Lights Swiss chard or spicy radishes like Alpine, you can create a garden that's both productive and beautiful. With proper soil preparation, spacing, and protection, your fall garden can thrive and provide fresh, homegrown produce well into the winter months. So, grab your gloves and get planting. Your garden is just getting started!

Christine Coker, Ph.D.
State Vegetable Specialist
Research Coordinator, Hammond Research Station

Growing Forward

Meet LSU AgCenter's New Horticulture Experts

Photo by
Kathryn
Fontenot

The LSU AgCenter is excited to welcome two new horticulture extension specialists to the team — bringing fresh energy and expertise to gardens across Louisiana. Whether you're battling stubborn weeds or planting your next vegetable crop, these specialists are here to help.

Colton Blankenship, Assistant Professor of Horticulture Weed Science

Colton Blankenship joins the AgCenter with a strong background in weed science and a passion for integrated management strategies. Stationed at the Hammond Research Station, his work will support both commercial growers and home gardeners, with a focus on turfgrass and ornamental weed control.

One of his top priorities is tackling torpedograss, a persistent problem in Louisiana lawns and landscapes. Blankenship's research at North Carolina State University, under Katie Jennings, explored innovative weed control methods, including the use of electricity to kill weeds in crops like peanuts, cotton, sweet potatoes and cucumbers. His favorite tool? The Weed Zapper — a tractor-mounted implement that uses high voltage to selectively eliminate tall weeds like Palmer amaranth without harming the crops that grow below. He really loves controlling weeds in vegetable gardens so look out for new ideas coming your way.

Originally from southwest Georgia, Blankenship grew up on a peanut farm and earned his bachelor of science in biology from the University of Alabama, followed by his master's degree and Ph.D. from NC State. He began his role at the LSU AgCenter on Aug. 1 and is excited to collaborate with growers across the state. You can email him at cblankenship@agcenter.lsu.edu.

Christine Coker, Professor, Extension Station Coordinator and State Vegetable Specialist

Christine Coker joined the LSU AgCenter in July and brings over two decades of experience in urban horticulture and extension work. As the new coordinator of the Hammond Research Station and the state vegetable extension specialist, she will serve as a vital link between the LSU AgCenter and Louisiana's ornamental and vegetable industries.

Her work includes coordinating relationships with ornamental researchers and the green industry, as well as conducting small demonstration vegetable plots. Coker's favorite vegetables to grow? Brussels sprouts, peppers and yard-long beans, though she admits it's hard to choose. She also enjoys sneaking cut flowers into her trials, blending beauty with nutrition. One of her current projects includes a Johnny's Seed trial evaluating sunflowers and snapdragons as fall-planted cut flowers.

Originally from Tennessee, Coker holds degrees in biology from the University of Tennessee Martin and Austin Peay State University, and a Ph.D. in horticulture from Auburn University. She comes to LSU after 24 years at Mississippi State University, where she led community garden projects, vegetable trials and youth programs like Pathways to Possibility.

Coker is excited to meet Louisiana's producers and backyard gardeners and continue her mission of growing nutritious food and joyful ornamental plants.

Both Blankenship and Coker can be contacted at the Hammond Research Station at 985-543-4125.

We're proud to welcome them both to the LSU AgCenter family. Their expertise and enthusiasm will help Louisiana gardeners thrive — from backyard plots to commercial fields.

*Kathryn Fontenot, Ph.D.
Regional Director, Southwest Region*

Dormancy and the Hidden Work of Winter

As fall fades and temperatures begin to drop, fruit trees across Louisiana enter a quiet but critical phase: dormancy. To the casual observer, it may seem like nothing is happening. Leaves fall, growth halts and branches stand bare. But beneath the surface, trees are undergoing a complex internal reset — one that determines how well they'll bloom and bear fruit in the spring.

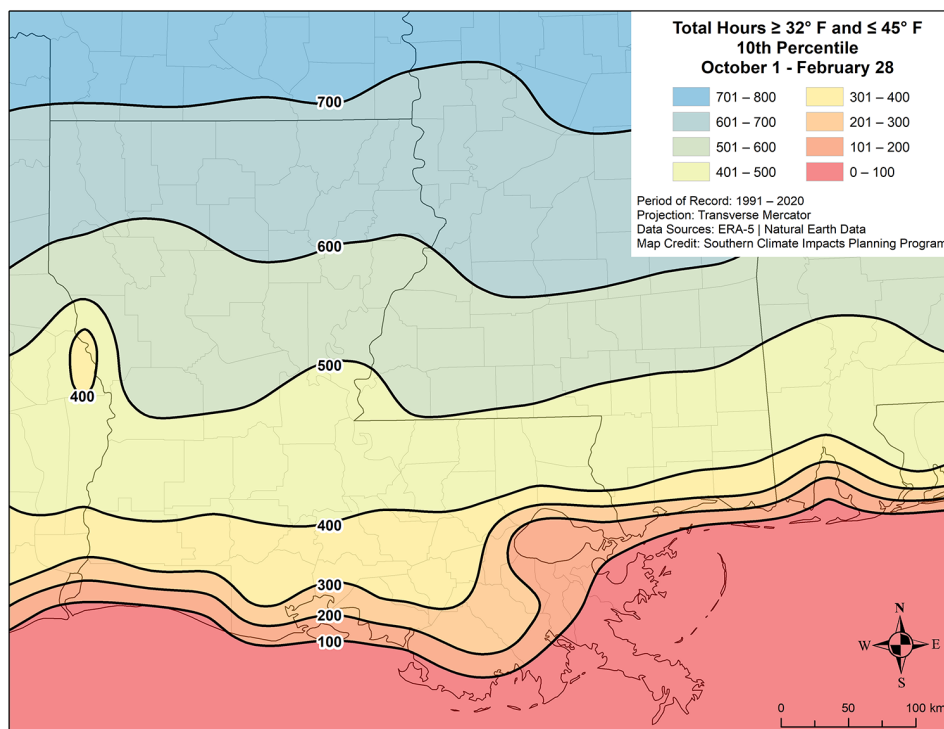
Dormancy is a survival strategy. It protects trees from cold damage and conserves energy during the winter months. More importantly, it allows fruit trees to recharge and prepare for the next growing season. This rest period isn't passive. It's governed by temperature cues, especially the accumulation of **chill hours**, which are essential for unlocking the tree's full potential when warmer weather returns.

Without sufficient chill, a tree's biological clock stays out of sync. Buds may remain dormant too long, bloom erratically or fail to open at all. Fruit set can be sparse or delayed, and in some cases, trees may skip flowering entirely and stay vegetative. These problems are especially common in Louisiana's mild winters, where chill accumulation can vary dramatically from year to year and region to region.

Understanding how dormancy works — and how chill hours influence it — is the first step in choosing the right fruit trees for your location and ensuring they thrive. In the sections that follow, we'll explore what chill hours are, why they matter and how Louisiana growers can use this knowledge to make better planting and management decisions.

What Are Chill Hours?

Chill hours measure the time a fruit tree spends in cool temperatures — typically between **32 F and 45 F** — during its dormant season. These hours help the tree transition out of winter rest, getting its buds ready to bloom and grow when spring arrives. Without enough chill, buds may remain dormant, bloom erratically or fail to open, leading to poor fruit set and reduced productivity.



Use this map as a guide to determine the number of chill hours in your location. Illustration by the Southern Climate Impacts Planning Program

The Science Behind Chill Hours

During dormancy, fruit trees suppress growth through internal signals, similar to how our bodies rest and reset during sleep. Exposure to cool temperatures gradually reverses dormancy, allowing buds to develop and bloom. This process is especially important for **temperate fruit species** like peaches, plums, apples and blueberries, which rely on winter chill to time spring growth correctly.

Most Louisiana growers use the **simple chill hour model**, which counts all hours between 32 F and 45 F. While more complex models exist, the simple model offers a practical estimate for home orchard decisions.

Not all cold contributes to chill:

- **Below 32 F** may damage buds and doesn't count toward chill.
- **Above 45 F** doesn't help the tree progress through dormancy.

This makes Louisiana's mild winters challenging, as warm daytime temperatures can offset the benefits of cold nights.

Why Chill Hours Matter

Chill hours aren't just a technical detail. They're a foundational part of fruit tree health and productivity. Each cultivar has a **minimum chill requirement** that must be met before it can transition from dormancy to active growth. If that requirement isn't met, the tree's spring performance can suffer in several ways.

Consequences of Insufficient Chill

Trees may show:

- **Delayed or uneven bud break**
- **Reduced flowering or aborted buds**
- **Weak bloom and poor fruit set**
- **Vegetative growth without bloom**

continued on Page 5

continued from Page 4

These symptoms are common in **low-chill winters**, especially in south Louisiana and occasionally in central regions. Sensitive crops like peaches, plums and blueberries may require over 600 chill hours to bloom reliably. Even adaptable trees like figs and pecans can show delayed leaf-out or reduced vigor when chill is marginal.

Understanding the Threshold

Each fruit tree variety requires a certain amount of cold before it can resume growth. This is called its chill requirement. If this threshold isn't met, the tree may remain partially dormant and underperform. Matching chill requirements to your region is essential:

- A **high-chill peach** in south Louisiana may never bloom properly.
- A **low-chill cultivar** in north Louisiana may bloom too early, risking frost damage.

Chill Hour Accumulation in Louisiana

Louisiana's climate presents a unique challenge for fruit tree growers: chill hour accumulation varies widely across the state, and even from year to year. Understanding your region's typical chill range is essential for selecting cultivars that will bloom reliably and produce consistent yields.

Regional Chill Patterns

Louisiana can be roughly divided into three chill zones:

- **North Louisiana:** Typically receives **600-800+ chill hours**, making it suitable for high-chill cultivars like many traditional peaches, plums and apples.
- **Central Louisiana:** Averages **400-600 chill hours**, which supports mid-chill cultivars such as rabbiteye blueberries and certain peach varieties.
- **South Louisiana:** Often accumulates only **200-400 chill hours**, especially in mild winters. This region requires low-chill cultivars that can bloom with minimal cold exposure.

These ranges are based on historical averages, but actual chill accumulation can fluctuate significantly depending on seasonal weather patterns. A warm December or January can dramatically reduce chill totals, even in northern areas.

Tracking Chill Hours

Growers can monitor chill accumulation using a few practical tools:

- **LSU AgCenter weather stations:** These locations offer localized temperature data and chill hour estimates across Louisiana.
- **Manual tracking:** Logging hourly temperatures between **32 F and 45 F** provides a rough estimate for hands-on growers.

In addition to numbers, **observing bloom behavior over time** is key. If trees consistently bloom late, unevenly, or not at all, it may signal that chill requirements aren't being met, even if recorded chill hours seem adequate.

Microclimates and Urban Influence

Local conditions can significantly affect chill accumulation. Urban areas often experience slightly warmer temperatures due to heat retention from buildings and pavement. Similarly, trees planted near structures or south-facing walls may receive less chill than those in open fields. These microclimate effects can influence bloom timing and should be considered when selecting cultivars or interpreting chill data.

Matching Cultivars to Your Chill Zone

Choosing the right fruit tree cultivar isn't just about taste or appearance. It's about compatibility with your local climate, especially winter chill. Each cultivar has a specific chill requirement and planting one that doesn't match your region's chill accumulation can lead to poor bloom, reduced fruit set or even complete crop failure.

Once you understand your region's typical chill hours, use that information to guide your selection. Local nurseries and LSU

AgCenter recommendations are excellent resources for finding trees that are both well-adapted and readily available. If you're unsure, start with commonly grown peaches, blueberries or plums suited to your area, and observe how they perform over time. Over several seasons, you'll gain insight into which cultivars thrive and which ones struggle under your local conditions.

Risks of Mismatched Cultivars

Planting a high-chill cultivar in a low-chill zone often results in:

- Weak or absent bloom
- Delayed leaf-out
- Poor fruit set
- Long-term decline in tree vigor

On the other hand, low-chill cultivars planted in high-chill zones may bloom too early, exposing flowers to late frosts. While some growers use protective measures like frost cloths or delayed pruning, the best strategy is to select cultivars naturally suited to your region's chill profile. By aligning cultivar selection with chill hour realities and local conditions, growers can avoid common pitfalls and make informed decisions that support long-term orchard success.

Closing Thoughts

Chill hours may be easy to overlook, but they play a vital role in fruit tree success across Louisiana. By understanding your region's chill patterns and choosing cultivars that match, you can avoid common bloom problems and set your orchard up for a productive spring. Whether you're tracking chill hours or simply observing how your trees respond each year, winter offers a quiet but powerful opportunity to plan wisely and grow better.

*Michael Polozola, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor*

*Never miss an issue of Horticulture Hints from the LSU AgCenter!
Visit the Horticulture Hints
website at
www.LSUAgCenter.com/HortHints*

Winter Lawn Management

Winter is the time when warm-season lawns across Louisiana take a much-deserved rest until spring. While lawns are not actively growing during much of the winter, the actions you take — and don't take — between November and February set the stage for how your grass performs next spring. Here are some tips to keep your lawn healthy throughout the winter and ready to shine next spring.

Don't Fertilize During Winter

Warm-season grasses such as St. Augustinegrass, centipedegrass, bermudagrass and zoysia are dormant or semidormant in winter. Fertilizer should only be applied to **actively growing lawns**. Fertilizer applied in winter won't be used efficiently and may leach into groundwater. Additionally, that fertilizer could feed any freshly germinated winter weeds that have popped up in your lawn. Save fertilizer applications until the lawn greens up in April and we're well past the threat of frost.

Weed Control

Winter weeds such as annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*), lawn burweed (sticker weed), chickweed and henbit can take over thin or stressed turf. Spring is not the time to treat lawn burweed; remove it before spring arrives.

- **Preemergence herbicides** (such as prodiamine, dithiopyr or isoxaben) applied in late fall or early winter can greatly reduce weed problems. Isoxaben is best for broadleaf weeds and is safe for our four major warm-season lawn grasses.
- **Postemergence herbicides** may be used during mild winter days (above 50 F) if weeds are already visible. Spray twice, once in late fall and again in winter. On St. Augustinegrass and centipedegrass, atrazine is the go-to for small winter broadleaves and some annual bluegrass suppression, with metsulfuron (MSM) excellent on lawn burweed, clover, henbit and chickweed (use light label rates). On bermudagrass and zoysia, skip atrazine if they're still green; instead, use a three-way mix (2,4-D + MCPP/MCPA + dicamba) or MSM for broadleaf weeds. Avoid spraying near hard freezes, follow the label for your grass and spot-spray when possible.

Manage Leaves and Debris

A blanket of leaves blocks light, traps moisture and can incubate disease. You don't have to bag every single leaf. Regular mulching with a sharp mulching blade on your lawn mower is fine and returns organic matter to the system. What is best to avoid is letting mats of oak or magnolia leaves sit for weeks. Those mats can smother the turf, keep the surface too wet, and create thin, bare patches that winter weeds love. Now is also a good time to blow any debris that may have accumulated in any shady corners to improve airflow.

Water Only if Needed

Winter evapotranspiration is much lower than in summertime. Dormant lawns aren't using much water, and evaporative demand



Spring weeds like henbit can be controlled during the fall and winter using pre- and postemergence herbicides. Photo by Eric DeBoer

is low. In a typical Louisiana winter, rain more than covers turf needs. Irrigate only during extended warm, dry spells when the soil has actually dried out. Watering a dormant lawn without reason leads to soggy, cold soil and more weeds, moss and algae. Monitor soil moisture throughout the winter. If you're on sandy soil or a raised profile that sheds water fast, check more often.

Mow Sparingly

Your grass is likely not growing during the winter, but cool-season weeds will. An occasional winter mow helps keep the

continued on Page 7



Figure 1. At left, a mature ball moss plant. Figure 2. At right, a new ball moss plant with holdfasts. Photos by Raghuwinder Singh

Louisiana Plant Health Management: Ball Moss (*Tillandsia recurvata*)

Ball moss is neither a parasite nor a pathogen. It is an epiphyte and belongs to family Bromeliaceae, which consists of semi-tropical and tropical plant species including pineapple and Spanish moss. Ball moss or an air plant is not true moss but rather it is a small flowering plant (Figure 1). Ball moss is sustained by absorbing nutrients from water vapor and the surrounding environment. It does not derive nutrients or water from the host to which it is attached with the help of holdfasts (pseudo-roots). Holdfasts are not true roots, but short, strong projections used for attachment to any substrate (Figure 2). These structures may penetrate the outer bark but never invade the cambium layer of trees (Figure 3).

Although ball moss prefers to grow on deciduous trees with rough bark, it has been reported on numerous trees and shrubs, including Bradford pear, crape myrtle, elm, holly, magnolia, maple, live oak, pecan, pine, sycamore, walnut, and willow in urban landscapes. It can attach itself to any inanimate surface including fences, utility poles and cables, traffic lights and other physical structures (Figure 4).

Extending from Georgia to Arizona and Mexico, ball moss thrives in high humidity and low intensity sunlight environments. Unlike loose, fibrous Spanish moss also in the Bromeliaceae family, ball moss grows in a compact shape of a ball ranging in size from a golf ball to a soccer ball. The clustering or clumping of several individual ball moss plants due to its sympodial branching pattern create a "ball" like shape.

Ball moss leaves are narrow and grayish green, with pointed tips that curve outward from the center of the ball. It gets its moss-like appearance from the specialized trichomes present on the leaves (Figure 5). These trichomes are responsible for absorbing water and nutrients directly from the environment. Flower buds on mature ball moss plants emerge from leaf axils in May, and lavender color flowers (Figure 6) emerge on long pedicels in June. Ball moss is thought to be self-pollinated, and after fertilization, fruit remains dormant for several months. The brown fruit capsule splits open in early February and releases the seeds. Ball moss spreads to new locations via wind-dispersed seeds (Figure 7) and movement of small vegetative parts of the plant.

Ball moss may colonize both healthy and stressed trees, but it is more visible on stressed trees. Heavy infestation of ball moss



Diseases like large patch are the worst on overwatered turf. Photo by Eric DeBoer

canopy tidy and can prevent some weeds from flowering. Mow at your normal in-season height. Do not scalp. Scalping will expose stolons and crowns (meristems) to cold injury and encourages more winter weed germination in the opened canopy.

Winter Lawn Pests

Large patch (*Rhizoctonia*) is a fall-to-spring disease that flares with cool, wet weather, especially in zoysia and St. Augustinegrass. You'll see orange-to-brown rings or arcs. Adjusting your cultural practices can be a major help: avoid excess moisture, skip fall nitrogen and improve airflow. If you have a yearly history, a preventive fungicide program in fall (and sometimes a late-winter touch-up) can be used; azoxystrobin, myclobutanil, propiconazole, pyraclostrobin and triticonazole will reduce the spread of large patch.

Plan Ahead for Spring

This is the time of the year to get the highest return on your investment.

- Soil test now if it's been two to three years. A soil test will tell you whether you truly need phosphorous or potassium and whether your pH is drifting. If pH correction is needed, winter is a great time to apply lime (for low pH) or elemental sulfur (for high pH on appropriate soils).
- Service your equipment by changing oil and plugs, replacing air filters, and sharpening or replacing mower blades. If storing electric mower batteries, power them down to about 70% to 80% capacity for storage. Calibrate your spreader and sprayer. If you don't calibrate, you're guessing, and guessing is why lawns get striped or burned.

Eric DeBoer, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor

continued on Page 8

continued from Page 7

may cause small twigs or limbs to break off trees. It also may stress the host indirectly by restricting the surface area for new sprouts or growth. Ball moss may alter the morphology of the host by restricting water and nutrient uptake. A research study conducted by a team of scientists in semiarid zones of Mexico established that the mature reproductive ball moss plants altered (injured) the vascular bundles of mesquite tree affecting both water flux and conductivity resulting in death of branches. Another study reported that tight adhering of the holdfasts of ball moss plant could girdle small branches on heavily infested live oak trees leading to restricted bark enlargement resulting in reduced phloem transportation.

Management of ball moss generally is not required, particularly if trees or shrubs are lightly infested. However, ball moss coverage of more than 75% will require removal of the moss (Figure 8).

Although labor intensive, hand picking is the most effective method to remove ball moss from lightly infested small trees or shrubs. Pruning twigs and branches covered with ball moss may restore the affected trees. Chemical control of ball moss also is possible. Spray trials conducted by retired LSU professor Gordon Holcomb with baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) on live oak, crape myrtle, juniper and flowering cherry resulted in death of

ball moss. Both 2.5% and 5% baking soda sprays effectively killed ball moss plants within three to five days. Chemical burn injury at both concentrations of baking soda was observed on crape myrtle and flowering cherry leaves while no injury was observed on juniper and live oak leaves during these trials. Baking soda sprays may be programmed from January to February before the new flush emerges to avoid leaf burn injury of the host plant. If later application is necessary it is recommended to spray prior to flowering in June to help reduce seed set and dispersal. Copper-containing fungicides provide adequate control as well. Excessive use of copper-containing products may cause injury to the host plant, understory plants and the surfaces of physical structures.

If chemical control is warranted, choose a product that is labeled for ball moss control. Read the label carefully to apply the recommended dose and follow other directions to use the product. For control of ball moss on larger trees consult a local licensed arborist who specializes in pest control. Good cultural practices that promote vigorously growing healthy trees with dense canopies also are recommended.

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



Figure 3. Ball moss plant holdfasts (pseudo-roots) slightly penetrated the outer bark of a branch for attachment.

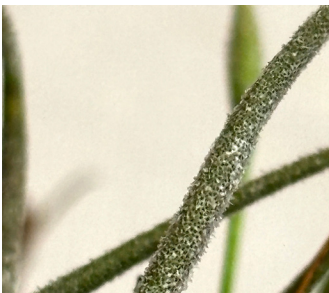


Figure 5. Trichomes on a ball moss leaf can absorb water and nutrients from the environment.



Figure 6. Lavender colored ball moss flower.



Figure 7. Young ball moss attached to outside of a building wall.



Figure 4. Ball moss plants growing on a variety of non-tree surfaces, including concrete utility pole, utility cable, outside building wall, and traffic light signal.



Figure 8. A crape myrtle tree heavily infested with ball moss on LSU campus. Photos by Raghuwinder Singh

Christmas Cacti:

Holiday Beauty That Lasts

While poinsettias often steal the spotlight during the holidays, Christmas cacti (*Schlumbergera x buckleyi*) and their relatives provide equally stunning seasonal color. Known for their gracefully arching stems and vibrant blooms in shades of magenta, red, pink, orange, gold and white, these holiday cacti are perfect for indoor decoration.

Unlike many cacti, Christmas cacti are native to the rainforests of southern Brazil and thrive in warm, humid environments. They do not tolerate hot, dry conditions or intense sunlight like desert cacti. For best results, place your cactus near a bright, indirect light source, such as an east-facing window or a bright bathroom or kitchen. Direct sunlight can bleach leaves, while shaded summer patios or porches can provide ideal outdoor conditions.

Watering is key to healthy growth and flowering. Allow the top 2 inches of soil to dry before watering thoroughly, letting excess water drain from the pot. Keep the soil evenly moist during flowering and reduce watering slightly when the plant is not actively blooming. Use a balanced houseplant fertilizer during the growing season to encourage vigorous growth and future buds.

Flowering is triggered by short fall days and cool nights, typically in the 50s F. To encourage blooms, place indoor plants outdoors in October (avoiding nights below freezing) to initiate bud formation. Once buds appear, return plants to a bright indoor location and maintain even soil moisture.



Christmas cacti are closely related to Thanksgiving (*Schlumbergera truncata*) and Easter cacti (*Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri*). Thanksgiving cacti bloom earlier, in October to November, and feature flat, toothed leaves, while Christmas cacti bloom from late November through early January, with rounded leaf tips and carmine-red flowers. Easter cacti bloom in spring, producing symmetrical, star-shaped flowers.

With proper care, holiday cacti can reward gardeners with colorful blooms year after year. They are low-maintenance, long-lived and bring a touch of tropical elegance to any home during the holiday season.

Mark Wilson
Horticulture Agent, Northwest Region

Brighten Your Winter Garden with Colorful Bulbs

Just because the temperatures drop doesn't mean your garden has to go dormant and gray. A few carefully chosen winter-blooming bulbs can add vibrant color and charm to your landscape, even in the coldest months.



Cyclamen coum

Cyclamen coum takes over from its autumn-flowering cousin, *Cyclamen hederifolium*, and is one of the first bulbs to bloom in winter, sometimes as early as January. Its delicate pink flowers emerge before the silver-marbled foliage unfurls, creating a striking contrast. Unlike *C. hederifolium*, which prefers dry shade, *C. coum* thrives in moist, well-drained soil and shaded areas under trees. Pairing it with snowdrops creates a beautiful early-season display.



Snowdrops (*Galanthus* spp.)

Snowdrops are a classic winter favorite with almost universal appeal. With many species and cultivars available, these dainty white flowers are beloved for their elegance and sweet fragrance. Try *Galanthus elwesii*, a giant, honey-scented variety, or *Galanthus nivalis* Flore Pleno, a charming double-flowered type. For a natural look, scatter the bulbs across the planting area and plant them where they land — creating drifts that mimic their woodland origins.



Winter Aconite (*Eranthis hyemalis*)

Winter aconites are cheerful gems in the garden, producing golden, cup-shaped flowers surrounded by a green collar of leaves, reminiscent of buttercups in the snow. These bulbs prefer moist soil and shady spots, making them ideal for underplanting among trees or shrubs. For the best effect, plant them in bold drifts and allow them to die back naturally in spring, resisting the urge to tidy them away too early.

Raised Beds Made Easy:

A Local Guide to Productive Gardening

Raised bed gardening is an efficient and adaptable method for growing vegetables. It's especially beneficial for gardeners dealing with poor soil, limited space or physical limitations. With proper planning, raised beds can lead to healthier plants, higher yields and a more enjoyable gardening experience.

Site Selection

Start by choosing a location that receives six to eight hours of direct sunlight daily. Fruiting vegetables like tomatoes and squash need full sun, while leafy greens such as lettuce and kale can tolerate partial shade. Ensure the site is close to a reliable water source and has good drainage to prevent root damage from waterlogging. Wind protection is also important. Natural barriers like shrubs or fences that can help shield plants from drying winds.

Soil Quality

One of the biggest advantages of raised beds is the ability to control soil composition. A loamy, well-drained mix rich in organic matter with a pH between 6.0 and 7.0 is ideal. This allows gardeners to bypass compacted or rocky native soils and create optimal growing conditions.

Accessibility and Layout

Raised beds should be placed where they're easy to reach for watering, weeding and harvesting. Beds oriented north to south receive more consistent sunlight. Leave space between beds for walkways and future expansion. Avoid areas frequented by animals and consider fencing to protect crops.

Benefits

Raised beds warm up and dry out faster after rain, allowing for earlier planting. They reduce the need for bending, making gardening more accessible. Dense planting is possible, which can increase yields per square foot. Their neat appearance also enhances landscape aesthetics.

Challenges

Raised beds can dry out quickly, especially during hot Louisiana summers, requiring more frequent watering. Initial setup costs for frames and soil may be higher than traditional gardening. Limited space can restrict crop rotation, increasing the risk of soilborne diseases. Sprawling crops like watermelons may not be suitable due to space constraints.

Material Options

Durable materials include cedar, redwood and pressure-treated lumber. Concrete blocks, bricks and composite materials are also



Adobe Stock photo

good choices. Metal options like galvanized panels offer a modern look. Avoid landscape timbers due to their short lifespan. Budget-friendly alternatives include recycled pallets or barrels.

Anchoring Techniques

To ensure stability, anchor beds using rebar, metal stakes or concrete bolts. Wooden stakes or posts can be driven into the ground before building. Metal brackets and corner hardware also reinforce the structure.

Site Preparation

Remove grass and weeds manually or use cardboard, newspaper or solarization methods. Nonselective herbicides may be used with caution. Rake the area clean before installation. Consider adding weed barrier fabric and a layer of cardboard inside the bed before filling with soil.

Soil Mix and Maintenance

A balanced mix of sand, compost and garden loam (1:1:1 ratio) works well. For small gardens, bagged raised bed mix is convenient; larger projects may benefit from bulk soil. Add fertilizer before planting and avoid excessive bark, which can tie up nitrogen. Drip irrigation or soaker hoses help maintain consistent moisture. Mulch or fabric barriers reduce weed growth while allowing water and air to reach the soil.

With thoughtful planning and care, raised bed gardening can be a productive and rewarding way to grow fresh vegetables in Louisiana's unique climate.

For more information, visit the LSU AgCenter website and view the publication [Home Garden Series: Raised Beds](#).

Kim Landry
Assistant Extension Agent

continued from Page 9

By incorporating these winter-blooming bulbs, gardeners can enjoy a dynamic, colorful landscape when most plants are dormant. Not only do they provide visual interest, but they also attract early pollinators and lift spirits during the gray winter months.

Mark Wilson
Horticulture Agent, Northwest Region

Where Old Seeds Take Root: Rediscovering Louisiana's Heirloom Treasures

What's new in the heirloom world? Well, a lot. Some new varieties were grown at the LSU AgCenter's Sweet Potato Research Station just south of Winnsboro this year and, good grief, the seeds! A black crowder pea obtained from Richland Parish has shown up in several places around central and northern Louisiana. It's a wonder why this little pea hasn't caught on more. It's super productive and, like most other field peas, holds up to Louisiana's sweltering summer with no problems.

Another field pea grown this year was Calhoun Crowder, an LSU release from the 1940s. Crowder peas are so named because the ends of the seeds are truncated instead of rounded like in regular purple hull peas. Thus, they look "crowded" into the pod. Calhoun Crowder is extremely productive and will make peas over a long summer if harvested regularly.

The major producer at the station this year was a cream pea that came from the Marvin "Bud" Weinberg Family of Rose Hill, Texas. The Rose Hill cream pea is delicious and makes a milky, creamy pot liquor. You'll have more seeds than you know what to do with if you let some pods dry out on the vine.

Another new find that was grown this year is a wild okra from Red River Parish. Called Ninock Plantation okra for lack of a better variety name, it is called wild because it's naturalized in old cotton fields around what used to be Ninock Plantation, south of Bossier City.

The plants are large as are the pods of okra they produce. And, when harvesting, some might find it necessary to wear long sleeves because this is an itchy okra. Seeds didn't start germinating until days were consistently above 90 F. Even then, germination was extremely asynchronous. But heirlooms aren't grown because they play by the rules. They're grown for flavor, and this okra definitely brings it. Big pods are perfect for slicing and frying, for smothering with tomatoes and for using in soups and gumbo. Usable pods must be harvested frequently, or they get too tough almost overnight.

And finally, what Louisiana heirloom garden is complete without a watermelon? This year, growing the Calhoun Gray again was pure joy. Calhoun Gray, a 1965 LSU release, is the result of crosses made between Charleston Gray and Calhoun Sweet. Calhoun Gray is perfect for home gardens because it's a guaranteed producer and highly disease resistant. Thirty-pound melons are common and if grown in isolation, plenty of seeds can be saved from year to year. The sweet, dark red flesh of a Calhoun Gray is just the thing on a hot summer day.

Kerry Heafner
Associate Extension Agent
Caldwell, Morehouse, Ouachita, Richland, Union, West Carroll
parishes
North Louisiana Seed Preservation Program



Calhoun Crowder is an LSU release from the 1940s and produces attractive plants.



Calhoun Gray is a favorite and was the industry standard for disease resistance at one time.



Weinberg's Rose Hill cream pea came from Texas. It's delicious and super productive.



This black crowder pea has shown up in a few parishes. These were from Cynde McClain Dubois of Ouachita Parish.



Ninock Plantation okra is a large variety that has old-time okra flavor.

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

Visit our LSU AgCenter Store
www.LSUAgCenter.com/OnlineStore

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

Visit our website: www.LSUAgCenter.com

P3655-25-W (online) 11/25
The LSU AgCenter and LSU provide equal opportunities in programs and employment.

2026 Get It Growing

Lawn & Garden Calendar

from the LSU AgCenter

Monthly Tips
Illustrated How-To
Louisiana Super Plants
Gardening Terms
Zone Map and More!



ORDER TODAY! Visit www.LSUAgCenter.com/OnlineStore

Reg. \$13.95. Receive \$2 off each calendar with a limited time offer. Ends 11/9/25