LSU AgCenter Research · Extension · Teaching

Horticulture Hints

for Louisiana

Summer 2026

Herbs such as basil can be grown in raised beds. Photo by Olivia McClure

Secrets to Raised Bed Gardening

Raised bed gardening continues to grow in popularity among home gardeners and for good reason. A raised bed is simply a mound or framed area of soil built above ground level, designed to create a deep, wide growing space where plant roots can thrive. By elevating the garden, raised beds offer solutions to many common gardening challenges while making the process easier and more productive.

One of the greatest advantages of raised beds is improved soil structure. Because the growing mix remains loose and uncompacted — no one ever walks inside the bed — roots can grow freely. This enhanced structure, combined with better drainage, often results in increased yields compared to traditional in-ground gardening. Raised beds also warm up earlier in spring, giving gardeners a head start on the season. For those dealing with poor native soil, such as heavy clay or areas plagued by hardpan layers, a raised bed effectively bypasses these limitations.

Another appealing benefit is accessibility. Raising the soil level potentially reduces the need for bending and kneeling, making gardening more comfortable for people with mobility or joint concerns. Beds should be no more than 4 feet wide, allowing gardeners to reach the center from either side with ease. When planning a location, choose a site that receives full sun — ideally at least six hours of direct sunlight per day. Morning sun is especially valuable for vegetable production. Be sure to avoid areas with poor drainage, and always call 811 to locate underground utilities before digging.

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Grow Your Own Jewelry: Job's Tears

You can harvest Job's Tears seeds at any shade of green or black to make jewelry, but wait until it turns gray if you are saving seeds to replant. Photo by Molly Lyles

The concept of plants as jewelry has been around for thousands of years. As a child, you may remember using the flowers growing wild to make necklaces and crowns to wear. Using natural objects to adorn our bodies has a long history and evolution that has played a role in our lives and cultures. Even today, our finest jewelry pieces are ones from natural resources. Botanical pieces of jewelry play a major role in that history, and where we see these materials used can indicate and help identify certain cultures around the world. One of these plants that is a part of this history is Job's tears.

A few years ago, I was introduced to this plant in a garden in Moncla, Louisiana. I was walking with a gardener and happened to notice her earrings. After I told her how much I liked them, she pointed to a plant in her garden with

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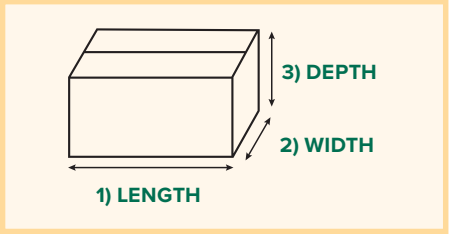
Raised beds can be constructed from a variety of materials, including treated lumber, cedar, fir, redwood, concrete blocks, or commercial vinyl and composite systems. A standard 4-by-8-foot bed can be assembled quickly using two 12-foot boards cut to size. Once constructed, the bed functions like a large container. For best results, fill it with a well-drained growing mix rather than native soil. Commercial potting mixes work well, though they can be costly. Many gardeners opt for a do-it-yourself blend made of equal parts peat moss, compost and pine bark. To calculate how much



mix is needed, multiply the bed's length, width and depth (in feet). For example, a 4-foot-by-8-foot bed filled to a 1-foot depth requires 32 cubic feet of growing medium.

Raised beds offer endless design possibilities, from simple rectangles to tiered systems, keyhole beds and decorative layouts that blend beautifully into the landscape. Vegetables, herbs, flowers and even small fruits perform exceptionally well in these controlled environments. With thoughtful planning and the right materials, raised bed gardening can be both highly productive and visually appealing — an ideal approach for gardeners of all experience levels.

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

Beating the Heat: Assessing Summer Stress in the Landscape

Straight to the point: *Summer stress often appears as wilting plants; however, it might not always be about water. Choosing the right plant for the right location in the landscape is an essential consideration, especially when shade is appreciated (or needed) by certain species. Address this through adding artificial or natural shade, adjusting expectations for plants or selecting a more suitable option to replace poorly performing plants.*

Summertime … and the living's easy, unless you (or your plants) are averse to the full sun or get particularly thirsty. Light is not a black or white issue and instead reflects **shades** of gray. Similarly, watering is a nuanced topic worth discussing. Too much or too little water poses problems, and simply adding water may not be a sustainable solution for certain species. Bearing this in mind, this brings forth an opportunity to illuminate issues with water and light in the summer landscape.

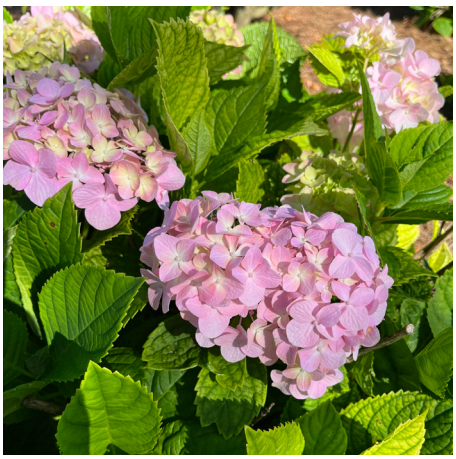
Let's start with shade. Yes, certain plants are categorized as full sun, full shade or partial shade, but that doesn't tell the whole story. Starting with the extremes … a little bit of shade on a full-sun site isn't the end of the world, and a little bit of sun on a shady site won't necessarily spell disaster. In many cases, the plant may survive in suboptimal conditions (too much or too little light), but may exhibit reduced vigor, flowering or color. Too much sun? Scorched leaves may occur. Too much shade? Stems may elongate as they look for light. These are just some of the symptoms that may be observed if a particular plant is placed in the wrong part of the landscape.

What about part shade? Well, that can mean many things. Dappled shade, such as beneath a live oak, can filter light, with the canopy branches bearing the brunt of the sun's rays while allowing some light to pass through. Southern magnolia will provide deep shade all year long with its large, evergreen leaves; however, deciduous trees may only provide shade for part of the year. So, shade conditions can fluctuate seasonally and with different tree species. Part shade can also mean part of the day, where afternoon sun versus morning sun (or shade) can be drastically different. With the sun rising in the east, plants on the eastern sides of buildings or other features receive morning sun (while it is relatively cooler out) and afternoon shade which provides protection from the hottest parts of the day. Conversely, plants on the western sides of buildings receive shade during the cool mornings but face the full sun and hottest temperatures in the afternoon. Southern side? Full sun all day. Northern side? More protection all day. Granted, these are generalities and do not account for every feature that may shield the sun. The path of sun won't vary, but if it ever does, please let me know!

Does this get you thinking differently about shade? Perhaps. But what does this mean for your landscape in the middle of summer? How can you apply it to your own yard? Consider the following:

1. **Right plant right place:** Don't put a square peg in a round hole, pick an appropriate plant for the site. For example, *Hydrangea macrophylla* is a beautiful flowering shrub that appreciates at least some afternoon shade from the heat. If provided afternoon shade or consistent dappled shade, this plant will perform well. If inundated with too much light, it may appear wilted, and watering

Hydrangea macrophylla **in dappled shade maintains an appealing aesthetic. Photo by Damon Abdi**



Hydrangea macrophylla **could struggle in full afternoon sun. Photo by Damon Abdi**

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won't necessarily fix your issues although proper watering is critical. So, either put your *Hydrangea macrophylla* in a shaded area (or provide shade for it) or pick a more sun-tolerant species. Fortunately, for those married to the idea of a *Hydrangea* in full sun, *Hydrangea paniculata* provides the desired, popular flower panicles and can take the sun.

2. **Adjust expectations:** Louisiana's summer weather can be stressful, even for plants well-suited for an area. Certain species like *Farfugium* (tractor seat plant) are sensitive to extreme weather conditions. You may have seen images (or examples in your garden) of the damage this plant takes during winter conditions, but with light pruning it comes back just fine. On the other end of the seasonal spectrum, *Farfugium* shows signs of stress (curling leaves) very easily during summer. Nothing to worry about too much, as it almost assuredly bounces back by the next morning, but bear in mind that if it will receive full afternoon sun, temporary signs of stress are not unusual and should be expected. Adjust your expectations for plant aesthetics accordingly or pick something less sensitive to the light conditions.

***Farfugium* shows signs of stress in the afternoon heat but reliably bounces back the next morning. Photo by Damon Abdi**

Covers can also cast shade over sun-sensitive species, like Japanese maple. Photo by Damon Abdi

3. **Casting shade:** Neighboring trees and features may cast shade on a site; however, if absent, limited or out of the way, installing artificial shade may be appreciated. Consider using shade cloths in place over sun-sensitive plants like Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*) to give them some relief from the summer sun. Of course, "right plant, right place" is a guiding principle, but if you are willing to modify the site conditions, you can create a better environment. Don't forget that people might enjoy shade in summer, too! A cover over a gathering area can keep people cool, or if sparser shade is desired, a pergola can let light through while maintaining an architectural element in the landscape.

Shade — or lack of it — should be considered when diagnosing landscape issues. Before potentially overwatering plants that seem to struggle in the sun, take a moment to consider if light conditions are the culprit. Remember, it takes a whole host of factors to keep your garden looking good, and all factors should be considered in your management practices.

Damon Edward Abdi, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Extension Specialist,
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A pergola provides filtered light and an architectural element in the landscape. Photo by Damon Abdi

Challenging Myself and My Garden with Something New: Growing Peanuts in Louisiana

If possible, purchase peanuts from local plant nurseries or hardware stores to obtain certified disease-free seeds for your garden. Photo by Kathryn Fontenot

When you think of spring and summer gardens in Louisiana the most popular vegetable crops that come to mind are tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, melons and peas. This year I was walking through the plant nursery, and like most years, I was dreaming about my garden and all the things I would try. A large bin of peanut seeds caught my eye. I've been contemplating growing peanuts for years but always held back because I knew they would take some time (100-120 days) from planting to producing. Also, because Don Ferrin, a former plant pathologist at the LSU AgCenter, used to tease me about how I was good at growing disease. He said that if bacterial wilt (*Ralstonia solanacearum*) was in the soil, peanuts would not only be affected by the bacteria but would also help grow the bacteria populations even higher by providing a great food source for it.

But before this scares you off, another good friend and former LSU horticulture professor Charlie Johnson said that when growing peanuts, you don't have to worry much about disease. He noted that when you harvest peanuts, you are going to remove the entire plant, pulling even the roots with nuts out of the soil.

With that being said, I couldn't help myself. Scoops of dry peanut shells and seed fell into that brown paper bag before I could stop myself. Before planting them into my own garden, I called Charlie to get his take on how to best plant peanuts since he had more than 30 years of experience in doing so himself. Below are questions I asked to be best prepared for this new crop in my garden.

What type of garden location do peanuts thrive in?

Peanuts thrive in full sun but need a minimum of four to six hours of direct sunlight a day. They are in the legume family and are related to beans and peas. And while they bloom above ground, the crop is actually produced below ground. Prior to planting, check your soil pH. Peanuts do best in slightly acidic soils with a pH of 6.0-6.5. Primary peanut growing areas are in Alabama and Georgia. Farmers located there keep the soil at 6.5 and apply a small amount of lime right before the peg goes through the ground to prevent pod rot, which is similar to blossom end rot. The peg is the small vine that emerges from the flower and eventually forms the peanut below the soil. Adding lime at this time also helps keep the soil a little pliable and allows the pegs to better penetrate the soil. If you have a super heavy clay soil, this is not an ideal crop unless you are heavily adding organic matter. Loam or sandy soil are more ideal for pegs to penetrate and make nicely formed nuts. Peanuts take less water to produce than tomatoes. Since they have a fairly deep main tap root and root system, 1 inch of water per week is more than sufficient.

What kind of peanut would do best for an amateur gardener?

If possible, it is best to purchase seed from a reputable dealer such as a local plant nursery or hardware store. These companies only sell seed from certified, clean, disease-free fields. You can also plant raw peanuts from a grocery store, though these peanuts were really grown for human consumption and not for replanting. Doing so risks carrying disease into your garden. There are many peanut cultivars, and all should do fine in a Louisiana home garden. But the cultivar you'll most frequently find is Virginia White Fancy.

How and when should I plant my peanuts?

Many gardeners follow spring crops such as tomatoes and peppers with peanuts as a cover crop in the summer to add nitrogen to the soil. Peanuts won't make as much nitrogen as clover but provide a tasty snack. Peanuts will extract extra fertilizers put into the garden with all of their vines, suppress weeds and add a good source of green manure. If you are growing this crop for optimum yields of nuts, then plant as early as mid-May to late June when the soil and air temperatures are warm. Production will take about 100 days to develop mature nuts. Before planting, apply fertilizer in a moderate amount using 5-6 pounds of 13-13-13 per 100 linear feet or 0.5-3/4 pound for a 10-foot row as a preplant fertilizer.

Plant raw, shelled nuts in the ground about 4 inches apart in a raised bed or row. Only plant them 1-1.5 inches deep. In hot and moist weather conditions, it takes about seven days for the seedlings to emerge from the soil.

Can I plant peanuts in containers? What size pot would be best?

Peanuts will thrive in a container with about a 15-to-20-inch top diameter. Only plant the seeds in the center of the container. Three seeds per container is plenty, as they need space to send their pegs out and develop nuts.

While my peanuts are growing, should I be doing anything special to keep them thriving?

Don't add extra nitrogen as they are growing because this increases vines and delays flowers. Like other legumes, you don't need a huge amount of fertilizer to be successful with peanuts.

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Pests of peanuts are limited, but gardeners should watch out for skunks and other animals that burrow in the ground. Sometimes southern blight can hurt peanuts as well. There isn't much a home gardener can do about southern blight other than pull the plants and throw them in the trash (not the compost pile) as soon as you see the white cottony growth symptoms forming at the base of the plant.

How do I know when to harvest my peanuts?

First, wait at least 100 days after planting. Usually, gardeners lift a vine to see the maturity of peanuts. Peanuts mature from the crown of the plant outwards towards the ends of the vine

Remove shells from peanuts prior to planting for a more uniform germination. Photo by Allen Owings

where the least mature nuts are. The shells of the peanuts should start looking wrinkly and have indentions and raised parts. Smooth shells are an indication of immaturity. Towards the end of maturity, the skin of the nut becomes rougher. However, if you want to boil the peanuts you should pull them early. Vines also indicate mature nuts when the plant foliage lightens a few shades of green. The vines should also be very thick. Lift an arm and see what you have before harvesting.

I hope other gardeners take the plunge with me this year and try something new — maybe peanuts, maybe a new cultivar of tomatoes or peppers, or a cut flower you've never tried. The point is you've got to keep trying new things in the garden to stay current. Life is all about learning and growing and becoming the best version of ourselves and our garden.

Happy gardening!

Kathryn "Kiki" Fontenot, Ph.D.
Regional Director, Southwest Region

Charlie Johnson, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus

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Harvested seeds from Job's Tears can be used for jewelry making. Photo by Molly Lyles

the same bead-like structures adorning the plant. It was growing, with its beautiful tear-like husks, among the other plants in her garden. She reached down to harvest some and demonstrated how they have natural holes in the middle that allow them to be used as beads for jewelry. It was such a wonderful moment to be able to see the plant producing these while she was wearing them as jewelry. As I did more research into this plant, I realized how wonderful it was for multiple reasons.

The plant's husks, which surround the grains, are tear-shaped and produced abundantly — giving rise to the common name Job's tears, a reference to the biblical character known for enduring great sorrow. Its scientific name is *Coix lacryma-jobi*. Botanically it is in the Poaceae family, and the genus, Coix, is Latin for corn. All meaning that it is a relative to the corn that you can see growing in our climate. Culinarily, it is used as an herb, vegetable and grain. The grains of Job's tears can be consumed just like other grains, but its husk has another popular use. The husks which surround the seeds have been used as jewelry since 3000 B.C. in many cultures and religions around the world. One example is its use as rosary beads in the Catholic faith.

It can be grown as an annual in the warm season but can survive as a perennial in areas with no frost. Plant them outside, about the same time corn is planted, when there is no danger of frost, and place them in an area that receives at least eight hours of sun. They can be directly seeded or started by transplant, which can allow you to start them earlier inside. Give them about a foot of space and expect to harvest the tear-like husks about four months from planting. I planted the seed about two years ago in my garden, and they reseed and come back every year. I let a few of the seeds drop from the plant to have more growing the next year.

There are multiple ways to harvest them for beads. Some harvest the seed when it is green and set it out to dry. As it dries, it will change colors into a greyish-pearl color. Others will let it mature on the plant and harvest when it gets closer to the greyish-pearl color. The reason that the seeds have a natural hollow center is due to how the male reproductive parts (tassels) grow up from that center.

If you are interested in learning more about growing this plant or would like seeds, email Molly Lyles at mlyles@agcenter.lsu.edu.

Molly Lyles
Assistant Extension Horticulture Agent for Avoyelles, Grant, Rapides and St. Landry parishes

Three Common Lawncare Mistakes to Avoid this Summer

Scorching temperatures, elevated humidity and variable rainfall during Louisiana summers create challenging conditions for maintaining healthy lawns. Even though our warm-season grasses like bermudagrass, centipedegrass, St. Augustinegrass and zoysia are well adapted to these conditions, they still require proper management to perform well through the summer months.

Unfortunately, many of the problems we encounter during the summer are not caused by the environment alone, but by well-intentioned management practices that end up making things worse. If your lawn struggles during the summer, there is a good chance one or more of the following mistakes is to blame.

Daily Watering or Overwatering

This is by far the most common and most damaging summer lawn care mistake. Many people assume that because it's hot, the lawn needs water every day. However, shallow watering encourages short, weak root systems and creates constantly wet conditions that favor disease development and weed seed germination.

A good guideline is to apply about 1 inch of water per week, including rainfall. For help calculating how much your irrigation system is putting out, see the LSU AgCenter's publication Louisiana Home Lawn Series: Simple Home Irrigation Audit. This amount should ideally be applied in no more than two or three irrigation events per week, rather than with daily watering. The common term we use is "deep and infrequent" watering. Remember, our warm-season grasses are well equipped to go for a few days with no water, and most probably even do better staying on the dry side.

Watering should also be done in the early morning hours. Evening irrigation keeps leaves wet overnight, which significantly increases the risk of disease. If your lawn feels constantly damp or spongy; you're always battling dollarweed, doveweed and sedges; or if you notice increased disease pressure, there's a good chance you're watering too often or too much.

Mowing Too Low

Scalping the lawn during the summer is one of the fastest ways to weaken turfgrass, reduce its ability to tolerate heat and encourage weed growth.

Each turfgrass species has an optimal mowing height range, and maintaining that height is critical for a healthy, resilient lawn. When grass is cut too short, it loses valuable leaf area needed for photosynthesis, which reduces energy production and weakens the plant. The result is a thin, stressed lawn that is more prone to weeds, drought stress and decline during extreme heat.

Footprints that remain in the grass indicate drought stress and a need for irrigation. Areas where footprints do not remain, such as near the top of this photo, do not need irrigation. Photo by Eric DeBoer

Mowing St. Augustinegrass too low leads to a weak, brown lawn. Photo by Eric DeBoer

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Recommended mowing heights for common Louisiana lawn grasses are:

- Bermudagrass: 1.5 to 2.5 inches (home lawns typically on the higher end)
- Zoysia: 1.5 to 2.5 inches
- Centipedegrass: 1.5 to 2 inches
- St. Augustinegrass: 3 to 4 inches

One of the most overlooked benefits of mowing at the proper height is that it actually makes lawn maintenance easier. Taller grass reduces how much leaf tissue is removed at each mowing, making it easier to stay within the "one-third rule" without having to mow constantly.

The one-third rule means you should never remove more than one-third of the leaf blade in a single mowing. When lawns are cut too low, they require more frequent mowing to avoid removing too much tissue at once. When maintained at a proper height, mowing frequency becomes more manageable, and the turf experiences less stress overall.

In addition, higher mowing heights provide several key benefits during summer:

- Increased shading of the soil surface, which helps conserve moisture
- Reduced soil temperatures
- Improved root growth and overall turf resilience
- Greater competition against weeds

Also, make sure mower blades are sharp. Dull blades tear the grass rather than cut it cleanly, which creates a ragged appearance and increases stress and disease susceptibility. If there is one cultural practice that consistently separates good lawns from poor ones in summer, it's **frequent** and proper mowing.

Overfertilizing

It's easy to think that more fertilizer will lead to a greener, healthier lawn, but during the summer, that approach can often backfire, especially when it comes to nitrogen.

Nitrogen is the primary driver of turfgrass growth and color, but applying too much during the summer can create more problems than it solves. Excessive nitrogen leads to rapid, succulent leaf growth that the plant cannot sustain under elevated temperatures and environmental stress. This type of growth is more vulnerable to disease, increases the need to mow and contributes to thatch accumulation over time.

Overapplying nitrogen can also reduce stress tolerance. Turfgrass that is growing too aggressively often develops a shallower root system and is less capable of handling heat, drought and traffic. In other words, the lawn may look good briefly, but it becomes less stable and more prone to decline as summer conditions intensify.

From an environmental standpoint, excess nitrogen is also more likely to be lost from the system. During heavy rainfall or irrigation events, nitrogen can move off-site through runoff or leach below the rootzone, particularly in sandy soils or heavily irrigated areas. This not only reduces fertilizer efficiency but can also contribute to water quality issues.

General annual nitrogen recommendations for common Louisiana lawn grasses are:

- Bermudagrass: up to 3 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year
- Zoysia: up to 2 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year
- St. Augustinegrass: up to 3 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year
- Centipedegrass: up to 2 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year

These totals should be split across the growing season, with lighter applications during the peak of summer. For most homeowners, that means no more than about 0.25 to 0.5 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per application during summer months, if needed at all. More nitrogen does not equal a better lawn in August. In many cases, it leads to more problems than benefits.

Conclusion

Summer lawn care in Louisiana is not about doing more, it's about avoiding the things that cause unnecessary stress. Deep, infrequent watering; frequent mowing at the right height; and moderate fertilization go a long way toward keeping lawns healthy through the hottest part of the year.

Additional Resources

Calculating irrigation system output:

https://www.lsuagcenter.com/profiles/madeleinestout/articles/page1711475653287

Dollarweed:

https://www.lsuagcenter.com/topics/lawn_garden/commercial_horticulture/turfgrass/turfgrass-weeds/broadleaf-weeds/dollarweed

Doveweed:

https://www.lsuagcenter.com/topics/lawn_garden/commercial_horticulture/turfgrass/turfgrass-weeds/broadleaf-weeds/doveweed

Sedges:

https://www.lsuagcenter.com/topics/lawn_garden/commercial_horticulture/turfgrass/turfgrass-weeds/sedges/purple-nutsedge

One-third mowing rule:

https://www.lsuagcenter.com/topics/lawn_garden/commercial_horticulture/turfgrass/management-practices/cultural-maintenance-practices/mowing-rule

Thatch management:

https://www.lsuagcenter.com/topics/lawn_garden/commercial_horticulture/turfgrass/management-practices/cultural-maintenance-practices/thatch-management

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Assistant Professor

Summer (Directive) Pruning: Managing Size in Fruit Trees

For many home fruit growers, tree size becomes a challenge long before production. Trees that were easy to manage when young can quickly outgrow their space, becoming difficult to harvest, prune or spray safely. In response, gardeners often rely on heavy winter pruning, only to see even more vigorous growth the following spring.

Most homeowners are not familiar with summer, or "directive," pruning as a management option. Pruning is typically viewed as a dormant-season activity and cutting during summer is often avoided out of concern for stressing trees during hot weather. As a result, many gardeners feel caught between trees that are too large to manage and pruning approaches that worsen the problem.

When used intentionally and at the right scale, summer pruning can help keep fruit trees shorter, more manageable and better suited to the home landscape. It is not appropriate for every tree or situation, but where height control is critical, it can play an important role alongside dormant pruning.

Understanding why summer pruning works — and when it should and should not be used — helps homeowners manage tree size without increasing stress.

What Is Summer (Directive) Pruning?

Directive pruning refers to selective pruning done during the growing season with a specific goal — most commonly controlling tree height, limiting excessive vigor and improving light distribution within the canopy. Unlike dormant (winter) pruning, which tends to stimulate new growth, directive pruning redirects growth rather than encourages it.

When a tree is pruned in summer, it has already invested energy into leaves and shoots. Removing select portions reduces total leaf area and limits its ability to respond with vigorous regrowth. As a result, summer pruning typically slows shoot extension, reduces shading and helps maintain size, rather than producing the flush of growth often seen after winter pruning.

It is important to distinguish directive pruning from heavy or corrective pruning. It relies on small, intentional cuts, usually removing upright, vigorous shoots or shortening overly aggressive growth. The goal is not to reshape the tree, but to guide growth to better fit the available space.

In practice, summer pruning should complement dormant pruning, not replace it. Dormant pruning establishes structure and addresses major issues, while summer pruning fine-tunes growth and helps prevent trees from outgrowing their intended size.

When Is Summer (Directive) Pruning Most Useful?

Summer pruning is most useful when the primary goal is managing size and vigor, especially where dormant pruning alone has not been effective. This is common in home landscapes, where space is limited and fruit trees must remain accessible for harvesting and routine care.

One clear situation is when trees become too tall or produce excessive upright growth. Strong vertical shoots often develop following winter pruning, especially in vigorous varieties. Removing or shortening select shoots during summer helps suppress continued upward growth and maintain a manageable height without stimulating additional regrowth.

Summer pruning can also help when light penetration into the canopy declines. Dense canopies reduce fruit quality, limit productive interior wood and increase humidity that can favor disease. Selective removal of vigorous shoots can improve light distribution without triggering the flush of growth commonly seen after dormant pruning.

In young trees, directive pruning may help with early height control when vigorous growth causes trees to outgrow their intended form. When used sparingly, it can slow vertical growth while preserving the scaffold structure established during dormancy.

It can also be helpful in long-established trees where size management is a recurring challenge. Combining modest dormant pruning with targeted summer pruning often produces better long-term results than relying on heavy winter cuts year after year.

Its value lies in intentional use. It is most effective when there is a clear objective — reducing height, limiting vigor or improving light, — and when cuts are kept small and selective. Used this way, summer pruning functions as a management tool rather than a routine seasonal practice.

How to Use Summer Pruning Effectively

Effectiveness depends on precision rather than quantity. The goal is to make small, deliberate adjustments that influence growth without increasing stress.

Begin by targeting vigorous, upright shoots, especially in the upper canopy. These contribute most to excessive height and shading and respond best to removal. In many cases, removing or shortening only a few can noticeably reduce further upward growth.

Keep cuts small and limited. Summer is not the time for large limb removal or structural changes. Only a modest portion of current-season growth should be removed at any one time. Removing too much leaf area reduces photosynthesis and increases stress, particularly during hot weather.

Pay attention to timing and conditions. Prune earlier in the day when possible and avoid extreme heat or drought. If trees are already stressed by moisture, disease or other factors, postpone pruning.

Finally, view summer pruning as a fine-tuning tool, not a stand-alone practice. Trees that receive good structural pruning during dormancy typically require less summer intervention.

When Summer Pruning Is Not Recommended

Despite its usefulness, summer pruning is not appropriate for every fruit tree. When misapplied, it can increase stress and reduce long-term performance, particularly under Louisiana's hot, humid conditions.

It is generally not recommended for newly planted trees. Young trees need maximum leaf area to establish roots and develop a sound framework. Removing foliage can slow establishment and delay development.

Trees already under stress should also be left unpruned. Drought, poor drainage, root injury, nutrient imbalances or disease can limit a tree's ability to recover. In these situations, reducing leaf area further restricts photosynthesis and can worsen decline.

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Summer pruning should not replace structural pruning. Large cuts, scaffold selection and major canopy adjustments are best made during dormancy. Attempting them in summer increases the risk of sunscald, weak regrowth and structural imbalance.

Timing is also important. Heavy pruning during extreme heat can increase stress, especially if large sections of previously shaded growth are removed. When summer pruning is used, it should be done selectively and with awareness of current weather and tree condition.

Finally, avoid pruning without a clear objective. Removing growth simply because it appears crowded or out of routine often creates more problems than it solves. Without a specific goal, such as height control or managing excessive vigor, summer pruning offers little benefit and unnecessary risk.

For most home fruit trees, restraint is key. Summer pruning works best as a targeted management tool, not a routine practice.

Conclusion

Summer, or directive, pruning is not a replacement for good dormant-season pruning, nor should it be applied routinely. When used intentionally and in moderation, it can effectively manage size, limit excessive vigor and maintain trees at a scale that fits the home landscape.

The key to success is understanding when it is useful and when restraint is better. Small, selective cuts with a clear objective can reduce future pruning needs and prevent trees from outgrowing their space.

For most home fruit growers, the goal is not perfect form, but long-term productivity, accessibility and tree health. Thoughtful summer pruning can help support those goals without adding unnecessary stress.

Michael Polozola, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor

Fruit crops that commonly benefit from summer (directive) pruning.

Fruit Crop	Relative Benefit	Notes
Citrus	High	Responds well to selective shoot removal; summer pruning is effective for limiting height, reducing excessive vigor and maintaining a manageable canopy in home landscapes
Apples	Moderate to high	Useful for controlling vigorous upright growth and improving light penetration, especially following strong dormant pruning
Pears	Moderate	Can be effective for managing upright shoots; pruning should remain selective and avoid periods of extreme heat
Peaches and nectarines	Moderate	Light, selective summer pruning can help manage excessive growth; avoid large cuts to reduce risk of sunscald
Plums	Moderate	Selective shoot removal can improve light distribution and help manage canopy density
Figs	Low to moderate	Can assist with height control, but most structural management is better handled during dormancy
Pecans (immature trees)	Moderate to high	Beneficial for guiding early structure by limiting excessive lateral growth, heading vigorous shoots and removing developing forks or potential crow's-foot branching
Pecans (mature trees)	Low	Limited response to summer pruning; tree size and structure are difficult to manage with pruning once trees are established
Muscadines (vines)	High	Commonly pruned during the growing season to manage excessive shoot growth, improve light penetration and maintain canopy structure; summer pruning is a standard and effective practice in muscadine production

Sun Safety and Hydration Tips for Gardeners

Gardening often means spending long stretches outdoors, making sun protection and hydration especially important due to our high humidity and summertime temperatures above 90 F. Overexposure to UV rays can lead to sunburn and eye damage and increases your risk of developing skin cancer. UV rays are present even on cloudy days and can reflect off surfaces like water, sand, concrete and grass. That is why practicing sun safety and hydration is important all year long but especially in the summer.

Along with applying sunscreen and wearing protective clothing, gardeners should take a few extra precautions to stay safe and comfortable while working in the yard or garden:

- **Garden early or late in the day.** Try to work before 10 a.m. or after 4 p.m. when UV rays are less intense.
- **Wear lightweight, breathable long sleeves and pants.** This protects your skin without causing overheating.
- **Choose a wide brimmed hat.** Larger brims provide better coverage for your face, ears and neck than a baseball cap.
- **Use gardening gloves with UV protection.** Hands are often forgotten and can burn easily.
- **Take frequent shade breaks.** Set up a shaded rest area or use natural shade from trees or structures.
- **Stay hydrated.** Heat and sun exposure increase dehydration risk. Keep a water bottle nearby.
- **Reapply sunscreen every two hours.** This is especially important when sweating heavily during outdoor work.
- **Use lip balm with SPF.** Lips can burn quickly while gardening.
- **Protect your eyes.** Wear wrap-around sunglasses that block UVA and UVB rays. Lenses that block 100% of the rays are preferred but any percentage is good.

Understanding Sunscreen Labels

Sunscreen can seem confusing, but the labels tell you exactly what the product is designed to do. The sun protection factor, or SPF number, tells you the level of protection against UVB rays, which cause sunburn.

- SPF 15 is the minimum recommendation for most people.
- Fair skinned individuals should choose SPF 30 or higher.
- Always select sunscreen labeled “broad spectrum,” which protects against both UVA and UVB rays.
- To get the maximum benefit from sunscreen, apply at least 20-30 minutes before going outdoors and daily, especially in the summer. If you are going to sweat, try to use water-resistant sunscreen so it repels water. Reapply every 90-120 minutes after excessive sweating to ensure proper skin protection.

Once you have finished gardening or working outdoors, go inside and cool off and rehydrate with these garden-fresh, infused water recipes. Remember to drink at least eight to 10 glasses of water per day. When working outside, take water breaks often to ensure you do not risk getting dehydrated or experience heat or sun exhaustion/stroke. Regular water breaks are also a suitable time to reapply sunscreen and grab some shade as well. The following infused water recipes were featured at the 2025 Garden Field Days in Crowley and St. Gabriel, Louisiana.

Lime Watermelon Infused Water

Ingredients:

1 lime
1 cup watermelon
8 cups cold water

Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Wash the produce.
3. Slice lime and cut watermelon into 1-inch cubes.
4. Add lime and watermelon to a pitcher and cover with 8 cups cold water.
5. Chill overnight in the refrigerator. The fruit will stay fresh in the water for up to 48 hours.

Other flavor options:

Use 1/2 sliced cucumber and 1 sliced lemon or lime.

Serving size: 8 ounces
Yield: 8 servings

Strawberry Cucumber Infused Water

Ingredients:

3/4 cup strawberries
1 cucumber, small
4 cups cold water

Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Wash all fresh produce before slicing. You can use fresh, frozen or canned fruit based on cost or availability.
3. Slice fresh produce into thin slices.
4. Place strawberries and cucumber slices into pitcher with cold water and mix.
5. Ideally, chill in the refrigerator overnight, though it can be enjoyed immediately after preparing. The fruit will stay fresh in the water for up to 48 hours.
6. After the water has been finished, you can eat the fruit or blend it into a smoothie.

Serving size: 8 ounces
Yield: 4 servings

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Upcoming Events:

- **May 9 – Spring Garden Stroll.** 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Join the Feliciana Master Gardeners and St. Francisville Beautiful on a tour of multiple gardens throughout St. Francisville. For more information, contact Jessie Hoover at 225-683-3101 or jhoover@agcenter.lsu.edu
- **May 28 – Evening in the Garden.** 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. LSU AgCenter agents will offer a family-friendly tour of the demonstration vegetable garden at the Rice Research Station located at 1373 Caffey Road in Rayne. Horticulture specialists and agents will discuss best management practices for growing vegetables in your home garden. Nutrition agents will host cooking demonstrations on vegetable-filled recipes, and 4-H agents will provide plenty of activities for the kids. For more information, contact Mariela Estrada at 337-788-8821 or mestrada@agcenter.lsu.edu
- **June 18 – Hammond Research Station Field Day.** Hours TBD. Join LSU researchers and industry professionals at the research station at 21549 Old Covington Highway in Hammond to learn more about research in the ornamental plant industry. For more information, contact Damon Abdi at 985-543-4125 or dabdi@agcenter.lsu.edu
- **July 8 – Watermelon Field Day.** 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. LSU AgCenter agents welcome everyone for a family-friendly tour of the watermelon garden at the Sugar Research Station located at 5755 LSU Ag Road in St. Gabriel. Horticulture specialists and agents will discuss best management practices for growing melons in your home garden. Nutrition agents will host cooking demonstrations using melons for drink and snack recipes, and 4-H agents will provide plenty of activities for the kids. For more information, contact Kiki Fontenot 225-235-9968 or kkfontenot@agcenter.lsu.edu or Ashley Pereira at 225-389-3055 or abarfield@agcenter.lsu.edu

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