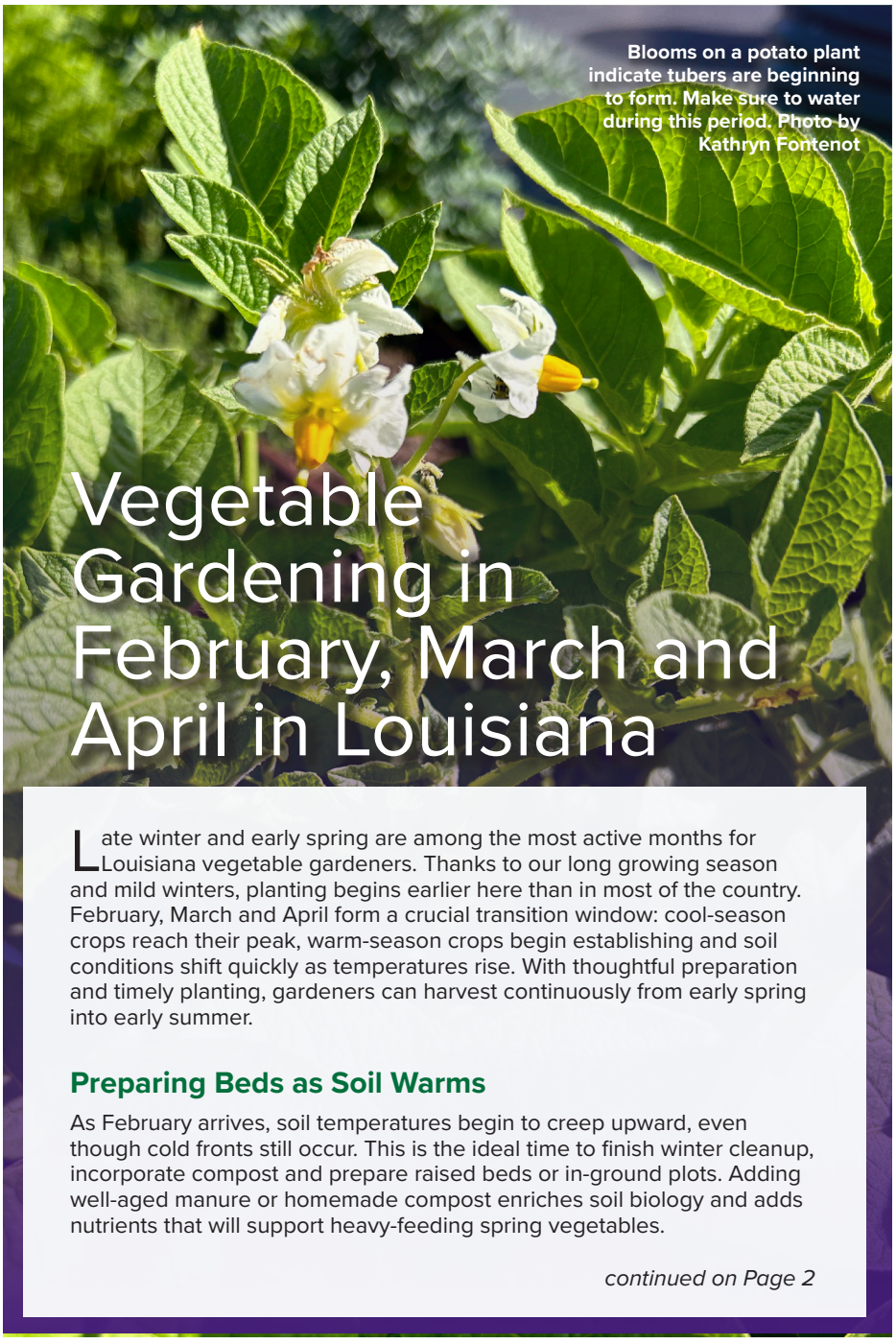
LSU AgCenter
Research · Extension · Teaching

Horticulture Hints

for Louisiana

Spring 2026



Blooms on a potato plant indicate tubers are beginning to form. Make sure to water during this period. Photo by Kathryn Fontenot

Vegetable Gardening in February, March and April in Louisiana

Late winter and early spring are among the most active months for Louisiana vegetable gardeners. Thanks to our long growing season and mild winters, planting begins earlier here than in most of the country. February, March and April form a crucial transition window: cool-season crops reach their peak, warm-season crops begin establishing and soil conditions shift quickly as temperatures rise. With thoughtful preparation and timely planting, gardeners can harvest continuously from early spring into early summer.

Preparing Beds as Soil Warms

As February arrives, soil temperatures begin to creep upward, even though cold fronts still occur. This is the ideal time to finish winter cleanup, incorporate compost and prepare raised beds or in-ground plots. Adding well-aged manure or homemade compost enriches soil biology and adds nutrients that will support heavy-feeding spring vegetables.

continued on Page 2

Spring Weed Management Considerations for Louisiana

As the weather begins to warm up, everyone is encouraged to take a moment to consider their weed management plans for the spring. Summer annual weeds will start to germinate and emerge over the coming weeks and months, and proper planning is key for staying ahead of schedule.

Lawns

Preemergence herbicides are an effective tool for managing summer annual weeds in Louisiana lawns. Remember that preemergence herbicides are those that need to be applied before weeds emerge. Generally, preemergence herbicides need to be applied to lawns in Louisiana before soil temperatures reach 55 F for a sustained period over multiple days in a row. General guidelines for spring preemergence herbicide application timings to lawns in Louisiana are in late January or early February in south Louisiana, and mid- to late February in central and north Louisiana. However, the weather can be unpredictable. It is important to monitor local weather and soil conditions to plan optimal application timings. As always, review the product label before application and ensure all directions and restrictions are followed.

Landscape Beds

There are several important considerations for weed management in landscape plantings. First, ensure that

continued on Page 3

continued from Page 1

Gardeners working in heavier clay soils, which are common in many parts of Louisiana, benefit from adding organic matter to improve drainage before spring rains begin. Those planting intensively or practicing crop rotation may choose to incorporate cool-season cover crops like tillage radish or winter peas earlier in the season. Tillage radish is particularly useful, as its large taproots loosen compacted soil and decompose quickly, creating channels that improve infiltration and root growth ahead of spring planting.

February: Prime Time for Cool-Season Crops

February is one of the most productive months for cool-season vegetables that thrive before heat and humidity arrive.

- **Direct-seed in February:** Carrots, beets, turnips, radishes, mustard greens, collards, Swiss chard, spinach and Irish potatoes. Mid-February — often around Mardi Gras — is the traditional planting time for Irish potatoes in Louisiana. Seed potatoes are cut into pieces with at least one eye and allowed to cure briefly before planting. They require loose, well-drained soil to prevent rot during cool, damp spells.
- **Transplant in February:** Broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, lettuce, kale and onions (sets and transplants). These crops prefer cooler temperatures and are less likely to bolt when planted early.
- **Weather and pest protection:** Lightweight row covers are extremely useful this month. They buffer plants from late frosts, protect against early-season aphids and flea beetles, and encourage faster growth by slightly warming the soil. As temperatures fluctuate, keep an eye out for cutworms, which emerge as soil warms.

March: The Transition Month

March is a pivotal month in Louisiana gardening. Cool-season crops remain productive, but warm-season crops begin moving to center stage as days lengthen and soil warms.

- **Warm-season vegetables to plant in March:** Tomatoes (transplants), peppers, eggplant, summer squash, zucchini, cucumbers, snap beans, sweet corn, pumpkins (late March) and melons (late March, depending on soil temperature). Tomatoes are especially time sensitive. Planting strong transplants in early to mid-March ensures that flowering occurs before early summer heat stalls fruit set. Direct-seeding snap beans and sweet corn works well once soil temperatures stay above 60 F. Beans in particular suffer in cool, wet soil, so planting too early can lead to rot.
- **Continuing cool-season plantings:** Early March is still suitable for lettuce, kale, mustard, collards, beets and carrots (early in the month). However, root crops planted later in March often struggle or bolt as temperatures rise.

April: The Full Shift into Warm-Season Gardening

By April, Louisiana has largely transitioned into warm-season vegetable production. Overnight temperatures stabilize, soil warms quickly and vigorous growth becomes the norm.

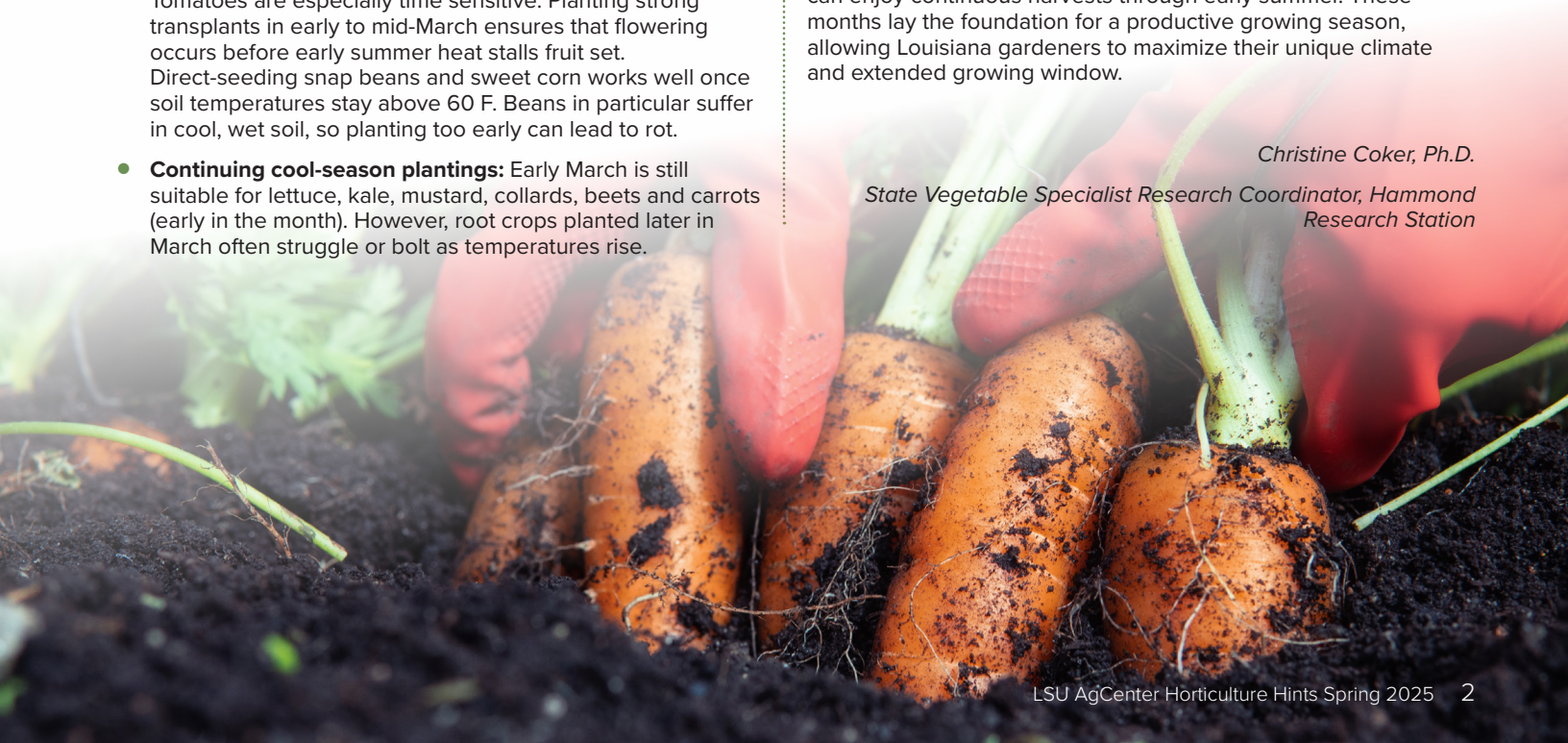
- **Warm-season crops for April planting:** April is ideal for planting heat-loving vegetables, including okra, southern peas (purple hull, black-eyed, crowder), lima beans, watermelons, cantaloupes, cucumbers, squash and zucchini (continued succession plantings), sweet corn (second planting), Malabar spinach, yardlong beans and pumpkins (early April). Okra, a quintessential Southern crop, germinates best in warm soil. Soaking seeds overnight softens the tough seed coat and improves germination. Southern peas and yardlong beans also thrive in rising temperatures and tolerate poor soils, making them excellent options for filling space after cool-season crops finish.
- **Tomatoes, peppers and eggplant in April:** Gardeners can still plant these crops in April, but the earlier they go in the better. Late-April plantings risk pushing fruiting into the hottest part of summer, which reduces yield. If planting later, choose heat-tolerant or shorter-season varieties.
- **Managing pests and disease in April:** With warmer, wetter conditions come increased pest pressures including aphids, whiteflies, squash vine borers and early stink bug activity, Powdery mildew on squash later in the month. Mulching helps moderate soil temperature and reduce splash-borne diseases, while drip irrigation minimizes leaf wetness. Floating row covers placed over squash early in the month can prevent vine borer infestations until flowering begins.
- **Harvesting cool-season crops:** Many February-planted vegetables — such as cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce and carrots — reach peak harvest in April. Removing them promptly frees up space for heat-tolerant vegetables and ensures the remaining plants do not bolt or become bitter.

A Season of Abundance

Vegetable gardening in Louisiana from February through April offers tremendous opportunity. With thoughtful planning — starting with cool-season crops in February, transitioning during March and embracing heat-loving vegetables in April — gardeners can enjoy continuous harvests through early summer. These months lay the foundation for a productive growing season, allowing Louisiana gardeners to maximize their unique climate and extended growing window.

Christine Coker, Ph.D.

State Vegetable Specialist Research Coordinator, Hammond Research Station



continued from Page 1

Weeds emerging in January landscape beds should be managed while small. Photo by Kathryn Fontenot

all existing perennial and winter annual weeds are removed before planting new installations, or early in the year for existing installations. Hand removal is usually the most effective strategy for this purpose. Next, consider mulch. In the case of existing installations, inspect mulch and plan to add more if it has degraded. If you can see bare soil, you need new mulch. For new installations, ensure that you are using an appropriate amount of mulch. For weed management purposes, at least three inches of mulch is likely to do a better job of suppressing annual weeds and will go a long way towards keeping weeds out of your landscape beds throughout the spring and summer.

As with lawns, consider applying preemergence herbicides to keep summer annual weeds at bay. Ensure that all labeled instructions are followed when applying preemergence herbicides to ornamentals, including checking for tolerance of present ornamental species, checking the list of species controlled to ensure common weed species are listed and checking for application timing relative to ornamental planting (pretransplant/posttransplant). All of that information can be found on the herbicide product label.

Fruit and Vegetable Gardens

For fruit and vegetable gardens, one of the most important weed management considerations is site preparation. Ensure that garden sites are completely free of weeds at the time of planting. If weeds are present when the garden is planted, then weed management is likely to be extremely challenging all year. Furthermore, it is critical to stay on schedule for weed management in gardens. Weeds can quickly take over garden plots if left unattended for any stretch of time; thus, ensure garden plots are regularly inspected for weed intrusion. Consider cultivating between rows or plants, and hand remove any weeds that germinate too close to plants for removal by cultivation. Weed management is easiest and most effective when weeds are small.

Colton D. Blankenship, Ph.D.

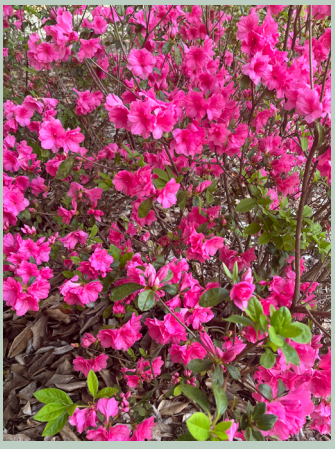
Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist,
Hammond Research Station

Spring Timing: Practices to Keep your Spring Garden on Schedule

Straight to the point: Prune roses in February, ornamental grasses in early March and spring-blooming shrubs as flowers fade. Don't fertilize until fears of frost subside. Moist soil manages temperatures better than dry soil. Mulch matters.

Waiting out the last bit of winter, you may be champing at the bit to get back to the garden. But springtime requires paying attention to Mother Nature's timing, as well as paying attention to your pruning and other practices, or else you will be paying your respects to your plants.

From February through early March, warm weather followed by a quick frost can wreak havoc on plants, especially if temperatures precipitously plunge overnight. Plants that are leafing out early are at risk of damage when that cold front rolls through. You'll have as much luck **stopping** this from happening as you would have in predicting **when** it happens; however, you don't have to encourage fresh growth either. Don't fertilize until early to mid-March for most perennial plants, or basically when you are reasonably confident that new growth won't be damaged by frost. What about watering? Don't let plants dry out during winter and spring. They still need water. Furthermore, moist soil does a better job of maintaining modest temperatures than dry soil does. So, if a freeze is forecasted for the near future, moisten the soil while it's still warm out. Don't forget to mulch. Research at the Hammond Research Station demonstrates that even just a couple of inches of mulch can make a meaningful difference in soil temperature maintenance.



Left: Wait until after flowers fade to prune azaleas. Right: Some people enjoy the late spring flower display from dusty miller while others prefer to remove them to force the plant to direct energy to the foliage. Photos by Damon Abdi

continued on Page 4

continued from Page 3

Gardenias are best pruned after flowering. Photo by Damon Abdi

Eager to do some pruning? Set a date for Valentine's Day to prune your roses. Many common everblooming roses will benefit from pruning in February (and a lighter, secondary pruning late summer), but some older varieties and once-blooming varieties are better served through severing after flowering finishes. Ornamental grass species like muhly grass can be cut back in early March. With the faded foliage having served its purpose (winter aesthetics and wildlife habitat), it is time for fresh foliage to grow in. Of course, remove dead, damaged, diseased or dying branches from plants any time of year. Late winter or early spring may offer you a better view of the branching architecture of deciduous trees, allowing enhanced visibility for pruning before leaves come in.

Spring flowering shrubs such as azaleas, gardenias and viburnums are best pruned after flowers fade. This provides a full summer and fall for new growth and flower bud formation for the following spring. What about hydrangeas? It depends. Bigleaf hydrangeas flower on old wood, so don't prune in spring. Panicle hydrangeas, however, bloom on new wood, so go ahead and cut at will and you will still have flowers in the summer. Basically, springtime requires patient, precise pruning in response to blooming patterns. Wait until blooms fade to prune spring-flowering shrubs and trees. With a wide enough variety of species in your garden, you will likely always have something to trim up at some point throughout spring.

Last bit of advice? Don't rush anything or jump to conclusions. After winter weather or a particularly notable spring cold spell, you may be concerned that certain plants won't come back to life. This is an especially common concern if the plant prematurely leafed out before the frost. Last year, sweet viburnums were one of the most commonly observed species with winter/spring damage. I have heard rejuvenation success stories for sweet viburnums when employing an aggressive pruning pattern and a healthy dose of nitrogen in very late spring or early summer. When in doubt, you can do the scratch test to see if woody perennials are still alive, give them a hopeful fertilizer boost or just wait it out. Sometimes it just takes time. Remember, you can always remove a plant later, but you don't need to rip it out unless necessary or unless you just want something new. In that case, use the rest of spring to put new plants in the ground before it gets too hot and stresses newly transplanted selections. Also, just because something is a cool-season favorite doesn't mean a little warm weather will completely wipe it out. One of last year's Louisiana Super Plants, dusty miller, will give a yellow flower display (which some appreciate) in late spring or early summer; however, many people remove the flowers to force the plant to direct energy to maintain the feature foliage. Regardless of how you manage it in late spring, dusty miller can last well into June without a problem.

Damon Edward Abdi, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Extension Specialist, Hammond Research Station

Grow Broccoli in Early Spring: A Win for Your Table and Pollinators

Louisiana gardeners have a unique advantage: Our mild winters and early springs allow us to grow cool-season vegetables not just in fall and winter, but again from mid-January through early March. One of the best crops to take advantage of this window is broccoli — a versatile vegetable that's not only delicious but also a secret weapon for attracting pollinators to your garden.

Why Plant Broccoli in Early Spring?

Timing is everything when it comes to broccoli. Planting between mid-January and early March ensures that your crop matures before Louisiana's hot weather sets in. Heat stress can cause broccoli to bolt prematurely, reducing head quality, when you want to consume it. By starting early, you'll harvest beautiful, tender main heads and still have time to let the plants develop side shoots and bloom for pollinators.

Choose early-season varieties that thrive in Louisiana's climate and mature quickly. Two excellent options are:

- **Green Magic:** 57 days from seeding to harvest
- **Imperial:** 66 days from seeding to harvest

These varieties produce quality heads early and then transition to flowering, which is exactly what we want for pollinator attraction.

Broccoli Flowers: A Pollinator Magnet

Why should we care about pollinators in our vegetable garden? One word: cucurbits. These crops include cucumbers, squash, watermelons and cantaloupes and depend heavily on pollinators for fruit set. March and April are prime planting times for these crops, so having broccoli flowers blooming simultaneously signals to bees and other pollinators that your garden is open for business.

Broccoli flowers are bright yellow and highly attractive to bees. Allowing side shoots to bloom after harvesting the main head creates a pollinator-friendly environment that can significantly boost yields in your cucurbits later in the season.

Fertilizer: Don't Skimp!

Healthy broccoli plants are key to success. To produce a decent-sized main head, plants should reach at least **2 feet in diameter**. Here's a simple fertilization plan:

1. **Preplant fertilizer:** Apply about **1/2 pound of 13-13-13** per 10 linear feet of row before planting.
2. **Sidedress:** Use a fertilizer high in nitrogen and low in phosphorus and potassium, such as calcium nitrate, about **three to four weeks after planting** and repeat a few weeks later. Using 1 tablespoon between every other plant is an easy rate to remember.
3. **Liquid feed:** Give a liquid fertilizer boost the day you cut the main head. This encourages vigorous side shoot growth.

When harvesting, cut the main head with a short stem to promote multiple side shoots. After the last fertilizer dose, let those shoots bloom, and you'll enjoy the sight and sound of bees buzzing happily in your garden.

continued on Page 5

continued from Page 4

When harvesting, cut the main head with a short stem to promote multiple side shoots. Photo by Kathryn Fontenot

Eating broccoli is best, but allowing some to flower attracts pollinators. Photo by Kathryn Fontenot

Watering and Weather Tips

January and February in Louisiana tend to be wet, but don't assume your broccoli is getting enough moisture. Vegetables need about **1 inch of water per week** for optimal growth. If rainfall is lacking, supplement with irrigation. Soaker hoses work nicely to keep water off the foliage to decrease chance of disease outbreak. Whatever irrigation method you choose, just try and water at the base of plants.

Starting Your Own Seedlings and Planting

If you can't find broccoli transplants at local nurseries or hardware stores, starting your own seedlings is easy. Allow **five weeks from seeding to transplant size**. While a greenhouse isn't necessary, make sure seedlings receive plenty of sunlight to prevent stretching. Space transplants at **least 12 inches apart** in the row. Although some extension publications suggest 9 inches, early spring's wet conditions can promote disease, so give your plants room to breathe.

Enjoy the Season

Growing broccoli in early spring is more than just a way to fill your plate. It's a strategy to set your entire garden up for success. By planting early, fertilizing properly and letting those side shoots bloom, you'll attract pollinators that will help your cucumbers, squash and melons thrive. Plus, you'll enjoy fresh broccoli before the heat arrives.

So, this season, don't just grow broccoli — grow a pollinator-friendly garden. Your vegetables (and the bees) will thank you!

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

Improved native selections like Woodman and Manda offer consistent production and disease tolerance. Photos by Michael Polozola

Rooted in Louisiana:
The Case for Native Fruit and Nut Trees

Long before orchards were planned and planted, native fruit and nut trees shaped Louisiana's landscapes and traditions. These trees have grown alongside our soils, rainfall patterns and seasonal rhythms for generations. They know how to handle wet feet in a floodplain, shrug off a late frost and thrive in the heat and humidity that challenge many other popular orchard varieties.

Native trees also tend to require less input once established. Their natural resistance to local pests and diseases means fewer sprays and less worry. For homeowners who want to grow fruit without a full-time commitment — or who simply want to plant something that will last — native trees are a smart choice.

But the benefits go beyond the orchard. Native fruit and nut trees support pollinators, birds and other wildlife in ways that imported species often can't. Their blooms feed native bees in early spring, and their fruits nourish everything from deer to songbirds in fall. Planting a mayhaw or persimmon isn't just an investment in your landscape. It's a contribution to the broader ecosystem.

Mayhaw (*Crataegus spp.*)

Mayhaws are small, floodplain-native trees that have long been part of Louisiana's cultural and culinary heritage. Their tart red fruits ripen in late April to early May, just as spring gives way to summer. Though they resemble crabapples, mayhaws are actually hawthorns and are adapted to wet soils and seasonal flooding, especially in bottomland hardwood areas.

For homeowners, mayhaws offer both beauty and utility. Their early spring blooms are among the first to feed native pollinators, and their fruit can be made into prized jellies and syrups. Improved selections like Maxine, Red Champ and Double G provide larger fruit, better yields, and easier harvesting compared to wild trees making them ideal for home orchards.

Mayhaws thrive in full sun and moist, well-drained soils. They are also a great choice for low-lying areas that stay damp in winter but dry out by summer — conditions that challenge many other fruit trees. Planting mayhaw is a way to preserve tradition while enjoying a reliable crop in Louisiana's unique landscape.

American Persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*)

The American persimmon is a true Southern native — rugged, reliable and rich with fall flavor. These trees grow wild throughout Louisiana, often along fence lines, woodland edges and old homesteads. Their deep orange fruits ripen in late fall and are famously astringent until fully soft, at which point they become sweet and custard-like.

Persimmons are especially valuable in low-maintenance landscapes. They tolerate drought, poor soils and partial shade, making them a good fit for areas where other fruit trees might struggle. For homeowners who want dependable fruit without the hassle of multiple trees, improved hybrid selections such as Deer Candy and Deer Magnet are excellent choices. These varieties combine native hardiness with better fruit quality, earlier ripening and consistent yields — perfect for home orchards and wildlife alike.

Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*)

Pawpaw is one of Louisiana's most unique native fruit trees, offering a tropical twist in a temperate landscape. Its custard-like fruit, often described as a blend of banana and mango, ripens in late summer and is prized for fresh eating, smoothies and desserts. Pawpaws thrive in moist, well-drained soils and tolerate partial shade, making them perfect for woodland edges or low-maintenance landscapes.

These small trees (typically 15-25 feet tall) are easy to manage and require minimal care once established. They are naturally resistant

continued on Page 7

continued from Page 6

to most pests and diseases, reducing the need for sprays. For reliable fruit production, plant two or more trees for cross-pollination, as most pawpaw varieties are not self-fertile. Improved selections like Sunflower and Shenandoah offer larger, sweeter fruit and better consistency than wild types.

Pecan *(Carya illinoinensis)*

Pecans are deeply woven into Louisiana's landscape and agricultural history. Native pecans have grown along riverbanks and floodplains for centuries, anchoring soil with their deep roots and providing shade and food for wildlife. These trees are known for their longevity, resilience and ability to thrive in challenging conditions.

For homeowners, pecans offer more than tradition. They provide a dependable source of nuts with minimal care. Improved native selections like Woodman and Manda are gaining attention for their consistent production and disease tolerance in unsprayed settings. These cultivars bridge the gap between wild genetics and orchard performance, making them ideal for low-input landscapes.

Cross-pollination is essential for good nut set. Pecans produce male and female flowers on the same tree, but their timing rarely overlaps. Plant at least two compatible varieties with overlapping pollen shed and nut maturity periods to ensure reliable production.

Pecans require space. Plant them where they can grow to full size without crowding other trees. While they take time to bear, they reward patience with decades of harvests. Choosing a native selection means less spraying, fewer pest problems and a tree that feels at home in Louisiana's climate.

Planting for the Future

Native fruit and nut trees offer more than just seasonal harvests. They connect us to the land, support local ecosystems and carry forward traditions rooted in Louisiana's natural history. Whether you're planting a mayhaw in a low spot, a persimmon along the edge of your woods or a pecan that will outlive you, each tree is a quiet investment in resilience and renewal. This spring, consider adding one native tree to your landscape — not just for the fruit it may bear, but for the legacy it leaves behind.

Mayhaws ripen from Aprli to May. Photo by Skip Lavespere

Michael Polozola, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

Springtime Lawn Irrigation Refresher

One of the most critical, and often misunderstood, components of a thriving lawn is proper irrigation or water management. Yes, water is essential for lawn health, but too much (most often the case) or too little (less common) can lead to long-term health consequences for your grass. Spring is a wonderful time to prepare your irrigation system for summer and brush up on some irrigation best management practices that will set the stage for a pain-free growing season in 2026.

The Hidden Problems of Overwatering

One of the most common issues seen in lawns around Baton Rouge is too much irrigation. It makes sense that more water would equal greener grass, that is, unless said water keeps your soil saturated and your roots suffocating from lack of oxygen. Excess soil moisture or chronically moist soil creates an environment ripe for disease, encourages shallow root growth, helps weed seeds germinate (weed seeds love moist soil) and wastes water, an increasingly precious resource. Overwatering can also lead to nutrient leaching, leaving your soil depleted and your lawn vulnerable to pests and weeds.

Signs of overwatering include:

- Your irrigation timer is set to water daily or even every other day. Space irrigation windows out as much as possible.
- Soggy soil or standing water is visible well after irrigation has ceased.
- Water runs off the surface of the soil into the street during an irrigation cycle.
- Evidence of increased fungal disease incidence including gray leaf spot, take-all root rot and dollar spot brown patch.
- Grass feels spongy and is thatch-laden underfoot.

The goal for irrigating a lawn is balance: enough water to sustain deep roots without drowning the soil. Remember that turfgrasses and their roots are aerobic organisms, so roots rely on oxygen diffusion from the atmosphere into the soil. Gas exchange in a chronically waterlogged soil is severely hindered, and the resulting lack of oxygen is not sustainable for long-term turfgrass root health. How can you make sure you are not overwatering and that the water you apply reaches its intended target?

continued on Page 8

continued from Page 7

Irrigation audits help prevent irrigation water (and your dollars) from going down the drain. Photo by Eric DeBoer

Start With an Irrigation Audit

Before you set your spring watering schedule, conduct an irrigation audit. This process identifies inefficiencies and helps ensure your system delivers water evenly and effectively. Steps for a basic audit include:

1. Inspect sprinkler heads for clogs, leaks or misalignment. A tilted head can waste gallons of water. Look for heads spraying garden beds or concrete and adjust them.
2. Look for leaks in pipes or valves. Even a small leak can waste thousands of gallons over a season.
3. Check coverage by placing small containers such as tuna cans in a grid around your lawn or an irrigation zone. Run your system for a minimum of 15 minutes and measure the water collected. Uneven distribution means adjustments are needed.
4. Test run times to ensure each zone is watering appropriately based on soil type and sun exposure. Measuring water volumes in catch cans associated with specific run times allows you to irrigate based on a volume of water rather than an arbitrary irrigation zone run time.

An audit not only saves water but also prevents dry spots and saturated areas that stress turfgrass. To reference a simple home irrigation audit fact sheet with more detailed information, visit www.lsuagcenter.com/profiles/madeleinestout/articles/page1711475653287.

Upgrade With Smart Technology

Modern irrigation systems offer tools that make water management easier and more efficient. If your system is older, spring is the perfect time to consider upgrades.

Smart controllers: These devices adjust watering schedules based on real-time weather data, soil moisture and seasonal changes. Instead of watering on a fixed schedule, smart controllers respond to actual conditions, reducing waste and improving lawn health. Many models can be controlled from smart phone apps, giving you access to your controller from just about anywhere.

Rain sensors: Rain sensors are the bare minimum that an irrigation system should have. Rain sensors automatically shut off irrigation during rainfall or after a rainfall event for a predetermined period. This prevents overwatering and saves money on your water bill. Think of a rain sensor like a sponge. It absorbs water, and as it grows, it trips a switch that prevents irrigation from running. As it dries out, the switch is no longer tripped, and irrigation will run again. This works well in theory but may result in irrigation being continued before it is necessary if the sensor dries faster than the soil after a major rainfall event.

Soil moisture sensors: A more accurate means of scheduling irrigation than a rain sensor is a soil moisture sensor. Installing these sensors in your lawn provides accurate readings of soil moisture levels. When paired with a smart controller, sensors prevent unnecessary watering by bypassing irrigation cycles if the soil already has adequate moisture.

Set the Right Schedule

Even with the most advanced technology, it is still essential to understand your lawn's water requirements. In general, most turfgrasses will do fine receiving about 1 to 1.5 inches of water per week, including rainfall. Water demand is highest when temperatures are high and humidity is low (when is humidity low in Louisiana?). In spring, cooler temperatures and higher humidity often mean less irrigation is needed compared to summer.

Tips for scheduling:

- Water deeply and infrequently. This encourages roots to grow deeper, making your lawn more drought-tolerant.
- Early morning watering is best. It reduces evaporation and minimizes disease risk compared to evening watering.
- Adjust for soil type. Sandy soils allow for rapid infiltration but poor retention of irrigation water, and clay soils reduce infiltration speed but do a better job of holding water.

Prepare for Summer Stress

Lawns that develop deep roots now will withstand heat and drought better as summer rolls in. Combine proper watering with other cultural practices, such as mowing at the correct height (3 inches and up for St. Augustine growers) and fertilizing appropriately for a care-free, beautiful lawn. By auditing your system, upgrading with smart technology and setting an efficient schedule, you will avoid common pitfalls like overwatering and uneven coverage. Start now, and your lawn will reward you with vibrant growth all summer long.

Eric DeBoer, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

How to Use Excel for Efficient Garden Planning

Planning a garden can be both exciting and overwhelming, especially when deciding what to plant and how to achieve a continual harvest. With so many crop options and planting schedules to consider, it is easy to get lost in the details. Tools like Excel can help streamline the garden planning process.

Here are three ways to utilize Excel for efficient garden planning:

- Calculate planting dates for succession plantings
- Determine when to plant for a specific harvest date
- Calculate expected harvest date based on planting date

Calculate Planting Dates for Succession Plantings

Excel can be used to determine planting dates for continual harvest through succession planting. This technique ensures a steady supply of crops to harvest throughout the growing season by planting at regular intervals. Oftentimes, seed packets or growing guides will provide planting intervals for a continual harvest. This can vary depending on the crops and how often you need to harvest. By tracking this data in a spreadsheet, planting intervals can be easily managed, ensuring a consistent availability of fresh produce. Excel provides a visual layout of planting schedules, making it easier to plan and execute a successful succession planting strategy.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Calculating succession plantings:					
2	Example:					
3	Plant	Variety	Days Until Harvest	Days Between Plantings	Planting Date	Harvest Date
4	Broccoli	Packman	50	14	1-Sep-25	21-Oct-25
5		Packman	50	14	15-Sep-25	4-Nov-25
6		Packman	50	14	29-Sep-25	18-Nov-25
7		Packman	50	14	13-Oct-25	2-Dec-25
8		Packman	50	14	27-Oct-25	16-Dec-25
9		Packman	50	14	10-Nov-25	30-Dec-25
10		Packman	50	14	24-Nov-25	13-Jan-26
11		Packman	50	14	8-Dec-25	27-Jan-26
12		Packman	50	14	22-Dec-25	10-Feb-26
13		Packman	50	14	5-Jan-26	24-Feb-26

Calculate Planting Dates for Succession Plantings

Excel is a useful tool for planning planting schedules around specific harvest dates. Many crop varieties have varying days to maturity, and understanding these timeframes is essential for timing planting to ensure crops are ready when needed. For example, if pumpkins are needed for a specific date, Excel can calculate the ideal planting dates for different pumpkin varieties, ensuring they mature around the same time. This helps with harvesting and selling crops just when demand is highest.

continued on Page 10

	A	B	C	D	E
1	When to plant different varieties for a specific harvest date:				
2	Example:				
3	Plant	Variety	Days until Harvest	Planting Day	Harvest Date
4	Pumpkin	Atlantic Giant	130	24-May-25	1-Oct-25
5		Autumn Gold	75	18-Jul-25	1-Oct-25
6		Baby Bear	105	18-Jun-25	1-Oct-25
7		Baby Boo	95	28-Jun-25	1-Oct-25
8		Big Max	110	13-Jun-25	1-Oct-25
9		Big Moon	120	3-Jun-25	1-Oct-25
10		Gold Medal	95	28-Jun-25	1-Oct-25
11		Gold Rush	120	3-Jun-25	1-Oct-25
12		Gooligan	95	28-Jun-25	1-Oct-25
13		Jack-Be-Little	100	23-Jun-25	1-Oct-25
14		Orange Smoothie	90	3-Jul-25	1-Oct-25
15		Prankster	85	8-Jul-25	1-Oct-25
16		Silver Moon	100	23-Jun-25	1-Oct-25
17		Small Sugar	105	18-Jun-25	1-Oct-25
18		Sorcerer	100	23-Jun-25	1-Oct-25

continued from Page 9

Calculate Expected Harvest Date Based on Planting Date

Excel can also be used to determine the expected harvest date based on the date seeds are planted. This is particularly helpful when planting multiple varieties of a crop with different days to maturity. For instance, when planting a mix of early, mid-season, and late-maturing broccoli varieties, Excel can track and compare the harvest dates for each variety.

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Calculating harvest date based off of planting date and days until harvest:				
2					
3	Example:				
4	Plant	Variety	Days Until Harvest	Planting Date	Harvest Date
5	Broccoli	Arcadia	95	1-Sep-25	5-Dec-25
6		Diplomat	75	1-Sep-25	15-Nov-25
7		Everest	80	1-Sep-25	20-Nov-25
8		Green Magic	57	1-Sep-25	28-Oct-25
9		Gypsy	60	1-Sep-25	31-Oct-25
10		Packman	50	1-Sep-25	21-Oct-25
11		Premium Crop	65	1-Sep-25	5-Nov-25

Excel and similar tools can be extremely helpful for garden planning by offering a simple yet effective way to manage planting times, calculate harvest dates, and plan successions. By inputting essential data such as maturity times, planting schedules and harvest windows, garden productivity can be continual and timely, and the overall planning process can be kept organized and well-timed.

If you would like access to these Excel templates, email Molly Lyles at mlyles@agcenter.lsu.edu.

Molly Lyles

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

Spring Gardening for Pollinators: Helping Bees Emerge Strong in Louisiana

As spring arrives, it can be tempting to head outdoors and begin cleaning up yards and planting gardens to beat the Louisiana heat. While this seasonal shift signals new growth for gardeners, it also marks a critical time for bees emerging from diapause, a resting period similar to hibernation.

How Bees Overwinter

Overwintering looks different depending on the type of bee.

Honey bees live in colonies that can persist for multiple years. During the winter, the colony clusters together inside the hive to maintain heat and survives by consuming honey reserves built up during the summer and fall.

For other social bees, such as **bumble bees**, only the newly produced queen survives at the end of the year. She finds a protected site and burrows a few centimeters beneath loose soil and leafy litter, where she enters diapause. During this time, the queen becomes dormant and does not forage, feed or reproduce for several months.

Many **solitary bees**, including leafcutter, mason, sweat, longhorn and squash bees, overwinter in nests constructed during the fall. These nests may be built in hollow or pithy stems, reeds, crevices, rotting wood or tunnels in the soil. In the fall, the female collects pollen and nectar to form a food provision, often called bee bread. She then places an egg on the provision and seals the cell. Multiple cells are typically constructed within a single nest. The developing bees overwinter as late-stage pupae or adults.

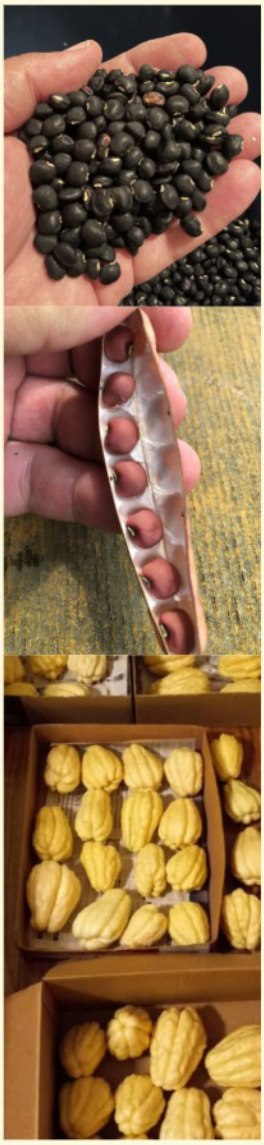
As temperatures rise in late winter and early spring, bees become active and emerge from their overwintering locations. Once active, these bees need immediate access to flowers to replenish their fat stores and fuel essential activities such as foraging, nest searching, and producing the next generation of offspring. Early spring vegetable plantings are a fantastic way to feed both yourself and pollinators as they emerge.

Early Spring Plants to Support Pollinators

Many spring-planted crops are delicious, nutritious and pollinator-dependent. Bee pollination improves the quality and quantity of many fruits and vegetables, benefiting both home gardens and landscapes. As we love to say at LSU, We Build Teams That Win, and planting crops that support pollinators while producing a healthy harvest is a winning strategy.

continued on Page 12

STATEWIDE SEED SWAP/SALE



LSU AgCenter
Research · Extension · Teaching

SATURDAY
FEB. 7TH, 2026
SOUTHERN FOREST
HERITAGE MUSEUM
77 LONGLEAF ROAD
LONGLEAF, LA 71448

9:00 A.M. TO 2:00 P.M.

GUEST SPEAKER:
ANGELA JOAN
MIRLITON.ORG

North Louisiana
SEED PRESERVATION PROGRAM
www.lsuagcenter.com/seedprogram

THE LSU AGCENTER AND LSU PROVIDE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN PROGRAMMING AND EMPLOYMENT. CONSISTENT WITH THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA), THE AGCENTER WILL MAKE REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS TO ENABLE PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES TO PERFORM ESSENTIAL DUTIES OF THEIR POSITIONS AND TO MAKE PROGRAMS SERVICES AVAILABLE TO ALL.

Upcoming Events:

- **Feb. 7 – Statewide Seed Swap/Sale.** 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Southern Forest Heritage Museum, 77 Longleaf Road, Longleaf. For more information, contact Kerry D. Heafner at the Ouachita Parish Extension office at 318-323-2551 or kheafner@agcenter.lsu.edu.

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-SP (online) 2/26

continued from Page 10

A wide variety of cool-season vegetables can be planted from mid-January to early March to provide nectar and/or pollen for bees including broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, collards, mustard greens, turnip greens, kale, kohlrabi, radishes and rutabagas. For more information on broccoli and pollinators, see Kathryn Fontenot's article, "Growing Broccoli in Early Spring: A Win for Your Table and Pollinators" in this issue of Horticulture Hints for Louisiana.

Supporting bees early in the season can improve their survival and health, leading to increased pollination of summer and fall crops, such as tomatoes, peppers, squash, cucumbers, berries, watermelons and citrus.

Spring Cleaning With a Pollinator Mindset

In addition to planting vegetables early in the season, spring cleaning decisions can have a big impact on overwintering bees.

Cavity nesting bees gather leaves, resin or other materials to partition and seal nest cells, with their offspring emerging the following spring to continue the life cycle. Photo by Lawrence Koenig

Bumble bee queens overwinter under loose soil and leaf litter. Leaving these areas undisturbed in early spring can prevent queens from being exposed to soon, increasing their risk of succumbing to the elements or not having available forage to support their survival. After emerging, queens will establish colonies in locations such as abandoned rodent burrows or at the surface of the soil, frequently at the base of grassy tussocks.

Inside a mason bee nest, each cell is provisioned with pollen and nectar (bee bread) for the developing larva and separated from adjacent cells with mud partitions. Photo by Morgan Dunn

Many solitary bees nest in hollow or pithy stems, reeds, crevices, rotting wood or tunnels in the soil. Leaving stems in place until bees emerge, or carefully moving plugged stems to a protected, undisturbed location can greatly support these species. Additionally, leaving a brush pile, dead wood or logs in your brush pile will provide nesting sites for bees.

There are a few ways to recognize stems used for bee nesting. They include:

- The opening of the hollow or pithy stem is plugged with mud, leaves, or plant materials (trichomes).
- Multiple stems in the same locations have similar plugs.
- There are no exit holes in the plugs, indicating they have not emerged yet.

Early spring gardening offers an opportunity to support pollinators at one of the most critical times of their life cycle. By planting early-blooming crops and approaching spring cleanup with care, Louisiana gardeners can help bees emerge strong while still enjoying productive, beautiful gardens.

Morgan Christman, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

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

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