

Horticulture Hints



Summer
2016

Landscape Gardening and Ornamentals

Mulch Matters

Mulching is an easy-to-do labor-saving gardening technique that all gardeners should take advantage of. A mulch is a material, usually organic but sometimes inorganic, that we use to cover the soil surface around plants. Mulching beds is an important part of sustainable landscaping.

Organic mulches, such as leaves, chopped leaves, pine straw, ground pine bark, dry grass clippings and newspaper, are all derived from once-living materials. They are popular for their ease of use, attractive appearance (except for newspaper) and because, as they decompose, they add beneficial organic matter to the soil. They are the most popular mulches.

Inorganic mulches are derived from nonliving sources and include such materials as plastic sheeting, landscape fabric or weed barriers, stone chips or gravel. Rubber mulch made from recycled tires and synthetic pine straw are inorganic mulches that have the look of organic mulches but last longer.

The first and foremost reason to use mulches is to control weeds. Every time weeds are removed, new weed seeds germinate, creating the problem all over again. Mulches work to stop this by blocking light from reaching the soil surface. Most weed seeds need light to germinate as this tells them they are close enough to the soil surface to sprout and grow. When covered over with mulch, they think they're still deep in the soil and will not germinate.

To create this barrier to weed growth, organic mulches have to be applied thick enough to do the job. Apply organic mulches about 2 inches thick around bedding plants and vegetables and 2 to 4 inches thick around shrubs for best weed control.

Another important function of mulches is conserving moisture in the soil. Your plants receive a more even supply of moisture and you save money on your water bill. Mulches also moderate soil temperature and reduce soil compaction. That's a lot of benefit from a simple gardening technique that is easy to do.

Which mulch you choose depends on a variety of factors, including the gardening situation, your preference based on appearance, what's available, cost and durability. I like to recycle yard waste such as leaves, pine straw and dry grass clippings and use them.

If you currently are not using mulches in your gardening efforts, I strongly recommend you give them a try. You'll be amazed at how much work they save you weeding and how nice they can make a garden look. If you are mulching, remember their primary function is not just decorative, so apply mulches thick enough and throughout your landscape beds and gardens.

Dan Gill
LSU AgCenter Consumer Horticulture Specialist



Dividing Bromeliads

Bromeliads are tropical or semi-tropical plants that are popular container plants. Once a bromeliad blooms, the original plant slowly dies but produces new plants, or pups, at its base before it does. One plant generally produces several pups, so you usually end up with more bromeliads than you started out with. Dividing bromeliad pups in summer is a great way to develop your plant propagation skills. Pups are separated from the original plant any time after they have grown to be about one-third the size of the original plant.

Using a sharp knife or hand pruners, cut the pups from the original plant at the point where they are joined. The pups should have some root development, but if they don't, that's OK. Pups will form their own roots after they are potted. Pot each pup individually in a small pot (generally a 3- or 4-inch pot is large enough) using a quality potting mix. Bromeliads should be planted only up to the base of their lowest leaves.



Since the newly potted pups will have a poorly developed root system or none at all, you may need to support them initially by placing two or three small stakes around the plant (chopsticks or pencils work well) until they are well established. Keep the potting medium moist but not constantly wet, and if the bromeliad is one of those that forms a cup with its leaves, make sure you keep it filled with water.

Adequate light is critical to getting the plant that grows from the pup to bloom. With good care, the pups will generally bloom one to three years after separation from the original plant.

It's nice to know that when you buy a bromeliad or receive one as a gift, if all goes well, you will end up with more plants than you started out with. This is one of the great joys of growing bromeliads and why they are so much fun to collect.



Bark Lice Harmless

You may be alarmed to see a thin film of silvery webbing over large areas of the bark of your trees in late summer. The webbing may extend from the ground up the trunk and into the branches. The insects that produce the webbing, bark lice or psocids, are harmless. They are scavengers and will not hurt the tree. No control is necessary.



Growing Sunflowers

Sunflowers are among the easiest flowers to grow, and they thrive in the heat of our summers here. This quick easy growth is why children are often so delighted with sunflowers. Depending on the cultivar, sunflowers will bloom anytime from about 55 to 75 days after planting the seeds (check the seed package information). Sunflowers can be broadly divided into those that are grown for production of edible seeds and those grown as ornamentals and for cut flowers.

You can start sunflower seeds in small containers with drainage holes and filled with potting soil. Locate the containers in full sun to produce strong, stocky transplants. Make sure you water regularly and never allow the soil to become dry. When the seedlings have grown 4 to 6 inches high, transplant them to sunny flower beds.

You can also sow the seeds directly into a prepared garden bed in full sun. After sowing the seeds, water the bed well, and then water the bed as needed to keep the soil moist (water lightly every day if the weather is dry).

While children often get a big thrill out of growing giant sunflowers, adults may find them a bit overwhelming for their gardens. Thankfully, breeders have developed a wide range of sunflower heights, and you can find cultivars that grow anywhere from about 1 foot to 8 feet tall or more.

In addition to a wide range of heights, sunflowers also come in a wide range of colors. While brilliant yellow will always be popular, you can also choose from creamy white, bronze, mahogany, rusty red, burgundy and orange, with some types producing flowers with more than one color. The center disk of the sunflower also adds to the display and goes through color changes as the flower matures and seeds form. There are even fully double types that produce flowers full of petals with no central disk at all (such as Teddy Bear).

Sunflowers that are grown for cut flowers generally produce numerous flowers on a more bushy plant than those types grown for seeds, which generally produce a single large head. The multiple-flowering habit makes these types more colorful and fits into traditional flower beds more appropriately. They come in a wide variety of colors.

If you want to grow sunflowers for the delicious, nutritious seeds, make sure you choose cultivars bred for seed production, such as Mammoth Russian (also known as Mammoth, Russian Giant and Gray Stripe). These tall-growing sunflowers produce a single, enormous flower at the top of the plant. To grow a really big seed head, make an application of general-purpose fertilizer when the flower head begins to appear.

The versatility and variety of today's sunflowers offer something for almost every garden and gardener. If you haven't tried this native American plant lately, give it another look.

Ways to Avoid Using Pesticides

The major pests we deal with are insects, weeds and fungal diseases. A pesticide is a product, whether organic or chemical, used to kill the target pest. Insecticides are used for insect control, herbicides are used in weed control, and fungicides control fungal organisms.

It is important to remember that the use of pesticides is only one method for controlling pests. There are other techniques gardeners should use that can help prevent the severe infestations that make the use of pesticides necessary. Minimizing the use of pesticides, whether they are chemical or organic, is always a good idea.

1. Make it a point to inspect your landscape frequently for developing problems. Weed control is a prime example where early intervention is far easier and more effective than letting a situation get really bad before taking action.
2. One of the best defenses against pest problems is to keep your plants in tip-top condition through good culture. Good culture includes proper spacing when planting, and planting the right plant in the right location where it receives the proper soil, drainage, water, light and nutrients.
3. An excellent way to avoid insect and disease problems is through plant selection. Simply choose plants that are well adapted to our climate, those which have been bred and selected for insect and disease resistance and those that are simply not prone to major problems. If you have a plant or plants that constantly seem to have something attacking them despite your best efforts, consider removing them and replacing them with plants that you have found to be more care free.
4. In vegetable gardens and annual flower beds that are replanted from season to season, crop rotation is important. Planting the same type of plants in the same bed year after year can cause a buildup in the soil of disease organisms that use that plant as a host. Plant different things in your garden in different places every year whenever possible.
5. Proper sanitation is another important factor in controlling insect, weed and disease problems. Always keep your yard, gardens and adjacent areas as weed-free as possible. Fruit and fallen leaves infected with disease should be raked up, bagged and thrown away.
6. Some disease organisms live in the soil and are splashed onto plants by rain. The application of mulch to soil under plants can reduce incidence of these types of diseases. This is especially helpful when growing fruit and vegetable crops like tomatoes, squash and strawberries.
7. Mulches are also the best way to save work and reduce the use of herbicides to control weeds in beds. Weeds are certainly a leading garden pest. Weed control, whatever method you use, is always more effective when done regularly and before the weed problem becomes major.



Tips for Selecting an Arborist

With the start of hurricane season, you should carefully evaluate your shade trees for problems. If work needs to be done, it's best to hire a licensed arborist. Here are some things to consider when hiring an arborist.

Make sure you use licensed arborists. The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry website lists the licensed arborists in Louisiana by parish.

Beware of door-knockers. This is especially common after storms when nonprofessionals see a chance to earn some quick money.

Never let yourself be rushed by bargains such as "If you sign an agreement today, I can take 10 percent off the price."

Ask to see their state arborist license. All practicing arborists must be licensed by the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

Ask to see certificates of insurance, including proof of liability for personal and property damage and workers' compensation. Then phone the insurance company to make certain the policy is current.

Ask for local references, and look at other jobs the company has done. Check with the Better Business Bureau.

Have more than one arborist look at the job and give you estimates to ensure you get a fair price. This also allows you to get other opinions on what work needs to be done. Don't expect one arborist to lower his bid to match another arborist's estimate.

A good arborist will never recommend – or agree to – topping a tree except under rare circumstances (such as to save the tree after severe physical damage to the crown).

Unless you simply need a tree removed, choose a company that offers a wide range of services (such as pruning, fertilizing, cabling/bracing, pest control, etc.).

Do not allow an arborist to use climbing spikes to climb a living tree unless the tree is being removed.

To make sure the work is performed to the standards you expect, a written contract is recommended. It should include the dates when the work will start and finish, exactly what work will be done, what cleanup work will be done and when and the total dollar amount you will be charged. If a tree is to be removed and the stump ground down, make sure the company agrees to remove all of the wood chips. It's recommend that you be present while the work is being done, even if you have to take off from work.

Don't be Your Plants' Worst Enemy

String trimmers that use a monofilament line for cutting down weeds and grass can be very damaging to young trees. Young trees have relatively thin bark. If the line is allowed to hit the trunk, part of the bark will be removed with each contact of the line. If you are not careful, you might even remove an entire ring of bark all the way around the trunk, girdling the tree. Mowers pushed hard up against or dragged around the base of young trees can be almost as damaging.

The part of a tree's circulatory system that carries food manufactured by the leaves to the roots (which can make no food for themselves) lies just under the bark. The damage that occurs when mowers or string trimmers remove patches of bark interferes with the tree's



Summer-blooming Vines

Vines can add much to a landscape, and there are many beautiful blooming vines we can use. Consider these vines for colorful flowers.

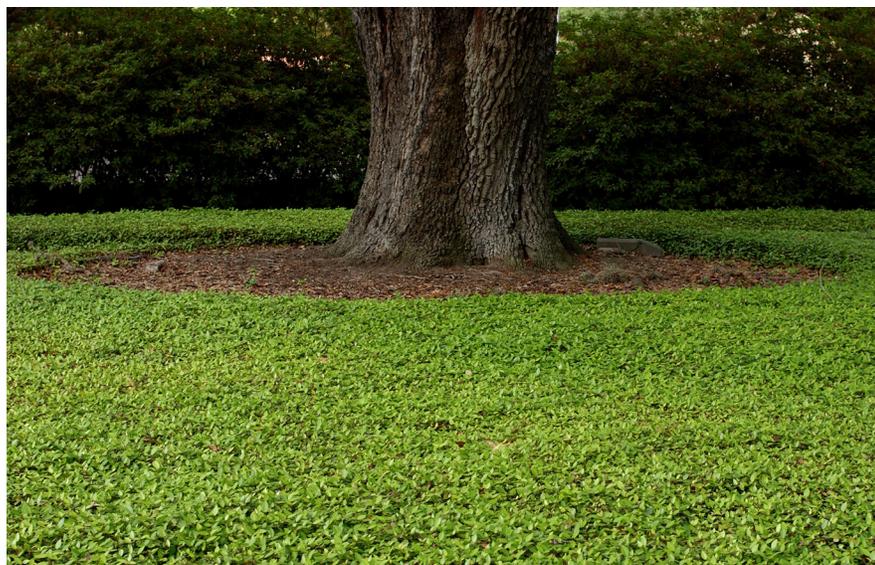
Perennial Vines: Rose of Montana (*Antigonon leptopus*, also called *Rosa de Montana* and *Coral Vine*); coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*); evergreen wisteria (*Millettia reticulata*); akebia (*Akebia quinata*); mandevilla (*Mandevilla Alice DuPont* and other varieties – not winter hardy); blue passion vine (*Passiflora caerulea*).

Annual Vines: hyacinth bean (*Dolichos lablab*); cypress vine (*Ipomoea quamoclit*); cardinal vine (*Ipomoea multifida*); moon flower vine (*Ipomoea alba*); morning glory (*Ipomoea purpurea*).

ability to send food to its roots. As the roots are deprived of food, they become stunted and function poorly, and this leads to a stunted, unhealthy tree. Remove a complete ring of bark, and you may cut off food to the roots altogether. Then the roots die of starvation, leading to the death of the plant.

In addition to interfering with food movement, open wounds created by mowers and trimmers can provide entry points for disease organisms that can cause decay.

Many sickly, stunted trees that have been planted for years but don't grow well have been damaged in this way. Look at the base of their trunks, and you will often see scars and callus growth from repeated injury done to the base of the tree.



To prevent these problems, do not allow grass to grow close to the base of young trees for the first three to five years after planting. Keep an area at least a foot out from the trunk grass-free (2 feet or more is better). A mulch 2 or 3 inches thick spread evenly over the area, but pulled back slightly from the trunk, will help a lot. Any stray weeds can be killed with a quick spray of glyphosate herbicide, if necessary.

Shrubs are generally planted in beds so are less at risk. But I have seen this problem occasionally when ground covers, such as Asiatic jasmine, are trimmed away from the base of shrubs with string trimmers. Whether you maintain your landscape yourself or pay someone to do it for you, don't let this kind of needless damage happen to your trees and shrubs.

Checklist for Summer

1. Control thrips, aphids, cucumber beetles and spider mites on roses by using a recommended insecticide or miticide. Also continue blackspot control by using a recommended fungicide at seven-to-10-day intervals.
2. When irrigating, water the soil area thoroughly. Try to irrigate less often, but irrigate well each time. Light, overhead sprinkling is not the best way to water.
3. Continue to plant warm-season bedding plants such as Mexican heather, ornamental peppers, ornamental sweet potatoes, angelonia, coleus, impatiens, periwinkle, cosmos, begonia, pentas, globe amaranth, ageratum, salvia Victoria, marigold, portulaca, blue daze, perennial verbena, purslane, dusty miller, rudbeckia, abelmoschus, narrow-leaf zinnia, Profusion zinnia, wishbone flower, caladium, balsam, gerbera daisy, gaillardia, celosia, lantana, scaevola, melampodium, butterfly weed, shrimp plant, cleome, four o'clock, perilla, hardy hibiscus (mallow), sunflower, salvias and cigar flower.
4. Plant sunflowers in late summer for fall flower arrangements. Flower colors include yellow, orange, red, bronze, white and combinations of these. It usually requires about 60-80 days from sowing seed until first flower color.
5. Prune azaleas no later than mid-July. Pruning azaleas after early to midsummer may remove next season's developing flower buds. This applies to most spring-flowering shrubs as well as hydrangeas and gardenias.
6. In early summer, gardenias may have aphids, whiteflies and the associated black sooty mold. For optimum plant performance, control the insects with Orthene or a light horticultural oil spray.
7. Keep caladiums well-watered during hot, dry weather to keep the foliage in good shape through the summer. You may apply a fertilizer now to encourage vigorous growth. Break off any flowers that form.
8. Prune repeat-flowering roses in late August or early September. This stimulates vigorous growth for the fall blooming season. Cut the bushes back about one-third their height, and remove any dead growth. Fertilize with a general-purpose fertilizer or rose fertilizer following package directions after pruning.
9. Louisiana irises are semi-dormant in late summer. Prune off seedpods and yellow or brown foliage to help keep the plants more attractive. You may transplant or divide Louisiana irises beginning in August.
10. Cut faded flowers from flowering annuals and perennials to encourage new growth and flowers. Old blooms and seed heads left on the plants can retard continued flower production.
11. Finish any pruning you may need to do to shrubs in the landscape, particularly those that bloom in winter or spring. Pruning later (after June) may interfere with flowering.
12. Keep up with weeding. This time of year, weeds can get out of hand very fast. Use mulches wherever possible. If you need help with herbicide recommendations, contact your local LSU AgCenter Extension office. Avoid applying most lawn weed killers during summer because high temperatures increase the chance that they will damage your lawn grass.



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The dog days of summer are approaching, and there is much to do in the garden. Gardening is a great activity to get in daily exercise, clear one's mind after a long day of work, grow nutritious food and just be at peace in nature. When taking care of your plants and enjoying the outdoors, remember to take care of yourself. Intense summer heat can quickly lead to dehydration. Drink plenty of water while gardening, wear a hat and sunscreen to protect your skin from the sun's rays and take small breaks, especially if you have a large garden. Adding a bench or a lawn chair to the garden area will remind you to sit back, relax and take a break from the heat.

Many crops are harvested and planted in June, July and August. See the notes below on gardening in June, July and August.



JUNE!

In mid-June, plant a summer crop of heat-set tomatoes. Planting heat-set tomatoes is VERY important. These cultivars have been bred to set fruit during high nighttime temperatures, whereas other cultivars will not. If managed correctly, heat-set tomatoes will produce fruit through October. Preferred varieties include Florida 91, Solar set, Sun Master, Phoenix and others. Heat-set tomatoes can be planted again in late July for fall tomato production.

Collard greens, cucumbers, watermelon, cantaloupe, okra, southern peas, pumpkins and summer squash can all be direct seeded into the garden during June. Start transplants of eggplants, peppers and sweet potato slips during June as well.



JULY!

Transplant a fall crop of heat-set tomatoes and bell peppers. Seed okra, southern peas, cucumbers, squash, cantaloupe, pumpkins and watermelons throughout July. Early to mid-July is the optimum time to plant pumpkins for harvest close to Halloween!

Late July/early August is a good time to start thinking about your fall garden. Order broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, cabbage and collard green seeds. If you want an early September planting of these crops, start seed in seedling trays in early August. A greenhouse is not necessary to grow these crops this time of year. However, daily watering is a must. You need at least a 5-to-6-week window from planting seeds of broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage and cabbage to transplanting them into the garden.

AUGUST!

Plant bush snap and bush lima beans in the garden. You can also plant seed trays of broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, cabbage, cucumbers, squash, mustard greens, and shallot sets for an early fall garden start in September.

You can transplant broccoli and Brussels sprouts as early as mid-August in the garden. In north Louisiana, start your lettuce seed and plant beet and Irish potato seed in the garden.

In late August, south Louisiana gardeners can start their lettuce seed and plant beet and Irish potato seed into the garden.

Crop Highlights

Broccoli and cauliflower. Both can be direct-seeded beginning mid-July through September or transplanted from early August through early September. It takes four to six weeks to produce transplants from seed. In general, broccoli and cauliflower will require 5 to 6 pounds (or pints) of a complete fertilizer such as 8-24-24 or 13-13-13 per 100 feet of row. These crops, especially cauliflower, require fast, continuous growth for proper head development. Keep them well watered and fertilized. Sidedress plants with 1.5 pounds (3 cups) of calcium nitrate per 100 feet of row three weeks after transplanting and again two weeks after that. Varieties that will produce in about 60 days from transplanting reduce the chance of cold-weather damage. Recommended varieties are:

Broccoli

- Gypsy
- Diplomat
- Packman
- Everest
- Castle Dome

Cauliflower

- Majestic
- Candid Charm
- Cumberland
- Snow Crown
- Freedom





Snap beans. Late August through early September is the best time to plant snap beans. Normally 50 to 55 days are required from planting until harvest. Water beans often. Good varieties are Provider, Roma II, Derby, Bronco, Royal Burgundy, Green Crop, Strike and Caprice. For a yellow wax bean, choose Golden Rod Wax. Bush beans usually will produce more successfully than pole beans during the fall because of their earlier maturity.

Lima beans. This crop is harder than snap beans to produce during fall. Plant early enough to produce before frost and late enough so they're not blooming while temperatures are too high for fruit set. Plant from early August through about mid-August. Plant bush beans for fall production – Henderson, Thorogreen, Jackson Wonder or Dixie Butterpea.

Irish potatoes. Plant small whole potatoes saved from the spring crop from mid-August to early September. Good soil moisture is essential. The seed potatoes may not sprout readily after planting because of a physiological rest period of about 90 days they have to go through after spring harvest. After this rest period is satisfied, the tubers should sprout. Fall yields are lower than spring yields. Use the smaller potatoes that you harvested for seed pieces.

Cabbage. Plant seed in mid-July and continue to seed through September. You also may transplant beginning in early August through mid-October. Fertilize the same as broccoli and cauliflower. Space cabbage, cauliflower and Chinese cabbage about 12 to 16 inches apart and broccoli 12 inches apart. Double drill (two drills of plants spaced 10-12 inches apart on a single row) will help maximize yield.

Squash and cucumbers. These two crops can be planted in June, July and August. Summer plantings normally will be ready to begin harvesting after about six weeks. Yields usually are lower than spring plantings. A fall crop of yellow summer squash, zucchini and cucumbers can be grown by planting seed during August. Squash vine borers may be a more severe problem during fall than spring, so be prepared to control them with an insecticide or use floating row covers until the plants start to bloom. After they bloom, remove covers to allow pollinators to visit crops. Viruses are a problem during fall. The best cucumber to plant is Dasher II.



Pumpkins. Pumpkins for Halloween should be planted early to mid-July. Apply 3-5 pounds of a complete fertilizer (13-13-13) for every 100 feet of row before planting. Plant five to six seed in hills about 4 to 5 feet apart on rows 6 to 8 feet apart. Thin to one or two plants per hill. Apply a sidedressing of 2 pounds of calcium or potassium nitrate per 100 feet of row when vines begin to run. Keep soil moist for best production. Orange Smoothie, Cinderella, Silver Moon and Conestoga are excellent varieties to grow for Halloween. Recommended varieties of giant pumpkins are Atlantic Giant and Prize Winner; however, remember that Louisiana is hot and humid, which makes growing pumpkins difficult. Don't fret if you do not reach award-winning sizes. WATCH for worms and spray routinely once they appear!

Greens. Begin planting greens – mustards, turnips and collards – during August. Keep the soil moist to ensure a good stand. If the greens aren't sprouting, you might have a lot of clay in the soil. This can form a hard crust. If this happens, reseed and lightly cover seed with a fresh potting mix. Doing so will allow tender seedling to break through the soil.

Shallots. Dry sets of shallots can be planted from August to April. About 50 to 60 days after planting, tops will be ready to harvest.

Fall bell peppers. If plants from the spring are still in good condition, they can be nursed (sprayed or dusted and watered) throughout summer. They will set fruit again as the temperatures become more favorable. If seeds of bell peppers haven't been planted by early June, buy transplants.

Fall tomatoes. Transplant fall tomatoes during July. Be prepared to spray with insecticides and fungicides. Insect and disease pressure usually is worse during fall than spring. The heat-set varieties that have produced well in trials are Sun Leaper, Florida 91, Sun Master, Solar Fire, Sun Chaser, Phoenix, Solar Set and Heat Wave II. These varieties have the ability to set some fruit during times of high temperatures, allowing the fruit to mature before cool weather. Row covers, which protect the plants from the first frost, have prolonged the harvest period, and they enhance fruit maturity. Also worth trying during fall is BHN 216. Because fall tomatoes are a crop you can't really be sure of, it's interesting to try several early varieties. Certain varieties may produce better in some parts of the state than others because of the variation in climate and soils. Start early and get a strong bush.

Lettuce. Lettuce is really hard to grow in summer. Waiting until fall is ideal. But if you must plant lettuce in August, plant it thick and harvest early. Allowing lettuce to grow until mature size oftentimes ends up in bitter bolted lettuce. Recommended varieties of head lettuce are Ithaca and Mavrick. For leaf lettuce, try Slo-bolt, Red Salad Bowl, Grand Rapids, Red Fire, Tango, Red Sails, Salad Bowl, Sunset, Simpson or Elite. The recommended romaine lettuce varieties are Parris Island, Ideal, Green Forest and Green Towers. For butterhead or bibb lettuce, try Buttercrunch, Esmerelda or Oak Leaf. For batavia types (leaf lettuce with a unique flavor), try Nevada or Sierra.

*Kathryn Fontenot
Vegetable Specialist*

Turfgrasses and Lawns

Tips for Summer Care of Turfgrass

- Summer is the major growing season for lawns in Louisiana.
- If you did not fertilize your lawn during the spring, you still have time to fertilize and get your lawn in good shape prior to fall. Keep up a good fertility program through early to late August.
- Remember to apply all granular materials on a dry lawn., then water soon after application.
- St. Augustine grass and zoysia both respond well to fertilizer applications. Fertilize zoysia twice per growing season – in April and again around June or July. St. Augustine grass may be fertilized three times during the growing season – April, June and mid-August.
- Bermudagrass is an even bigger fertilizer user and can be fertilized from three to eight times during the growing season, especially if you like to mow grass. Carpetgrass and centipede grass are not big fertilizer users. Usually, two applications (April and July) will take care of centipede grass, and one application will be sufficient for carpet grass (April).
- Centipede grass should receive its second and final fertilizer application in July. For centipede grass, apply only 1/2 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet as a complete turf fertilizer. For example, apply 3 pounds of 17-0-17 per 1,000 square feet or 5 pounds of 10-0-10 per 1,000 square feet. St. Augustine grass needs twice that rate.
- Fertilize St. Augustine grass, bermudagrass and zoysia in June and again in early to mid-August with at least 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. For example, apply 7 pounds of 13-13-13 per 1,000 square feet or 5 pounds of 19-19-19 per 1,000 square feet.
- Make sure lawns are getting adequate amounts of moisture during the summer months, but don't overwater. Water deeply only once or twice per week – or as needed, based on the amount of rainfall. Centipede grass is the least tolerant lawn to drought, so take care to provide adequate amounts of moisture for this grass, especially during dry periods.
- Watch for chinch bugs in St. Augustine grass and bermudagrass lawns and treat with an LSU AgCenter-recommended insecticide. Chinch bug problems show up as yellowish brown areas of the lawn during hot, dry weather. These insects extract plant juices from turfgrass stems and crowns while pumping toxic salivary fluids into the plants. The fluids disrupt the plant's vascular system.
- Check for chinch bugs in the lawn by saturating suspected areas with a gallon of water mixed with a few squirts of lemon dishwashing soap. This soapy solution irritates chinch bugs and brings them up near the grass surface so you can see them and determine if the bugs are causing the lawn damage.
- Additional insect problems that appear during summer include armyworms and tropical sod webworms. These moth larvae or "worms" can cause severe lawn damage very quickly and will need to be killed with insecticides to prevent further damage.
- Be mindful of these pests as you walk through your lawns. Investigate damaged areas and treat accordingly.
- Also this time of year, pull up small populations of Virginia buttonweed or carefully spot-treat with herbicides like metsulfuron (TopShot, Mansion, MSM Turf) or Celsius. These herbicides work well with repeated application spaced four to six weeks apart. Metsulfuron and Celsius can be safely applied on St. Augustine grass, centipede grass, bermudagrass and zoysia during warm weather.

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Weed Scientist/Turfgrass Specialist*



Fruits

Plums

Plums have many of the same insect and disease problems as peaches and may be a bit difficult for some homeowners to grow. Plums can be divided into three types: European (including the Damson), Japanese and indigenous American species. They are related to peaches, and the production practices for these two fruits are very similar. However, there is one major difference between the two. While peaches are self-fruitful, many plums are self-unfruitful. Plums need to be pollinated by another variety of the same type of plum. For example, two varieties of European plums can cross-pollinate, but European plums cannot cross-pollinate with Japanese varieties.

Planting

Plums should be planted 18 to 22 feet apart. They will grow in a wide variety of soil types but prefer deep, well-drained soil ranging in texture from a sandy loam to a sandy clay loam. Avoid areas where root-knot nematodes have been a problem. In the fall prior to planting, prepare the area by soil testing and incorporating lime as needed to achieve a soil pH between 6.0 and 6.5. Plant as early as possible in winter. Do not place fertilizer in the planting hole or fertilize immediately after planting. Wait at least six weeks after planting to fertilize.

Fertilization

Fertilize newly planted plum trees in early spring before leaves appear. Broadcast 1 cup of 10-10-10 fertilizer over an area 3 feet in diameter. Apply additional nitrogen in mid-May and mid-July by applying a half-cup of calcium nitrate or a cup of complete fertilizer like 10-10-10 evenly over an area 2 feet in diameter.

Beginning the second year, fertilize the trees twice annually. Make the first application in early March and the second around the first of August. Use these rules of thumb for the two fertilizer applications:

1. March application – Apply 1 cup of 10-10-10 for each year of tree age to a maximum of 12 cups for mature trees.
2. August application – Apply 1 cup of calcium nitrate per tree per year of tree age to a maximum of 6 cups for mature trees.

Always broadcast the fertilizer in a circle at least as large as the circle created by the limbs. Be careful not to concentrate the fertilizer near the trunk of the tree.

Pruning

Plums are dormant-pruned slightly differently than peaches. Thinning cuts that favor (i.e., leave) outward-growing branches are necessary to “spread” the plum’s upright tree form so that sunlight can penetrate the inner canopy and enhance fruit spur production. After the first growing season, heading cuts should be avoided. Begin dormant pruning after February 1 to reduce bacterial canker infection.



Problems

Pest problems are similar to pest problems on peach. Brown rot is the most common disease. Fungicides labeled for brown rot control on peaches can be safely used on plums.

Plums can be troubled with a disease known as black knot. This is a warty-looking growth on the limbs. Prune off and destroy all affected limbs.

Plums are also susceptible to bacterial canker infection, which can be reduced by using selected rootstocks. Insect problems include plum curculio, which causes wormy fruit, and peachtree borer, which attacks the tree at the soil line. Read and follow all label directions when using any pesticide.

Varieties

Many varieties are available. Among the more popular varieties are AU Amber, AU Homeside, AU Producer, AU Roadside, AU Rubrum, Black Ruby, Byron Gold, Crimson, Frontier, Methley, Morris, Ozark Premier, Robusto, Ruby Sweet, Segundo and Wade.

Plum varieties are usually budded to peach rootstocks. In the coastal plain, use Nemaguard or Guardian rootstocks to resist root-knot nematodes. In the rest of the state, use Lovell, Halford or Guardian rootstocks to reduce bacterial canker infection.

As a rule of thumb, plums are not self-fruitful; they need to be pollinated from a different variety that blooms at the same time. However, AU Amber and Methley are exceptions to this rule because they are partially self-fruitful. They can be planted as single trees with the understanding that production may be light in some years. Fruit set of these cultivars will be improved with the addition of other cultivars as pollenizers. Except in years of extremely mild winters, most recommended plum varieties will have sufficient bloom-overlap to ensure cross-pollination.

Harvest

Plums are productive and may yield 2 to 3 bushels per year. As the fruit ripens, it develops a powdery color. You may prefer to pick the Japanese varieties a few days before they are fully ripe and allow them to ripen in a cool room. Plums can be eaten fresh or used in baked goods. They have a relatively long storage life under refrigeration. Plums may be preserved in a number of ways, such as jellies, jams and juices.

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Horticulture Hints



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

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