



January 2017

## Got Mirlitons? Or chayote? How About Alligator Pears?

Whatever you call them, mirlitons are a great crop for the home gardener. Often described as a bumpy, pear-like squash, they are a member of the gourd family and a popular ingredient in many New Orleans holiday recipes. Simple to grow and relatively pest free, one vine can produce enough mirlitons for a family of four. They are also unique in that they are a perennial, making them a very good permaculture plant. Chayotes have a firm, creamy colored flesh, cook just like a squash, and can be eaten fresh, boiled, or roasted. Early records show that they have been grown in the New Orleans area since 1867!

Growing Mirlitons is pretty easy. Each mirliton contains one embryo, which will only grow if the fleshy part of the mirlitons gourd is surrounding it. The embryo sprouts from inside and sends out a shoot of leafy growth that grows very quickly. Just leave an intact mirliton (from the grocery store or from an existing vine) on your countertop all winter. A vine will begin to grow out of the larger end. Once the vine is growing, plant the mirliton at a 45 degree angle with the large sprouted end up. Be sure that you plant it near a fence or trellis so that it can climb upwards. Mirlitons are quick growing and will cover a large area, so plan on giving them their space.



Mirlitons growing on the fence at the demonstration garden at LaSalle Park in Metairie.



Shrimp and Mirliton Casserole is a traditional New Orleans dish.

The vine will die back in a frost, but a thick mulch around the roots will keep the plant happy and it will regrow in the spring. It typically takes 150 frost free days before the vine will produce more mirlitons. Each vine can make up to 100 fruits!

The entire plant is edible, and many great recipes can be made with the fruits, the shoots and the leaves. Because they don't have a strong flavor of their own, mirliton absorbs flavors well so it tends to work in many dishes. A quick stir-fry with garlic and soy sauce is a great way to utilize the leaves and shoots. Seafood stuffed mirlitons are a holiday favorite for many New Orleans families. Give those alligator pears, chayotes or mirlitons a try next time you need a great crop to cover an ugly fence!

~Anna Timmerman

# January Vegetable Planting Guide

| Crop             | Recommended Variety   | Planting Depth | Spacing Inches | Days Until Harvest<br>* from transplant date |
|------------------|---|----------------|----------------|--|
| Beets            | Detroit Dark Red, Kestrel, Red Ace F1, Ruby Queen   | ¼ inch         | 2-4            | 55-60  |
| Broccoli         | Arcadia, Diplomat, Gypsy, Packman, Premium Crop, Windsor Greenbelt, Patron  | ⅝ inch         | 18-24          | 70-90*                                       |
| Cauliflower      | Candid Charm, Cumberland, Freedom, Incline, Majestic, Snow Crown, Wentworth   | ⅝ inch         | 18-24          | 55-65*                                       |
| Cabbage          | Blue Vantage, Platinum Dynasty, Stonehead, Cheers, Blue Dynasty, Emblem, Rio Verde  | ⅝ inch         | 12-15          | 65-75*                                       |
| Chinese Cabbage  | None Given  | ¼ inch         | 12             | 60-80*                                       |
| Carrots          | Danvers 128, Purple Haze, Thumbelina, Apache, Enterprise, Maverick, Sugar Snax 54   | ⅝ inch         | 1-2            | 70-75  |
| Snow peas        | None Given  | ½ inch         | 4-6            | 61   |
| Collards         | Champions, Flash, Georgia Southern, Top Bunch, Vates  | ⅝ inch         | 6-12           | 75   |
| Kale             | None Given  | ½ inch         | 12-18          | 50   |
| Kohlrabi         | Early Purple Vienna, Early White, Vienna, Winner  | ⅝ inch         | 6              | 55-75  |
| Lettuce          | Esmeralda, New Red Fire F1, Nevada, Tall Guzmaine Elite   | ⅝ inch         | 4-12           | 45-80  |
| Mustard Greens   | Florida Broadleaf, Greenwave, Red Giant, Southern Giant Curled, Savannah, Tendergreen   | ⅝ inch         | 4-6            | 35-50  |
| Onions           | Red: Red Creole, Southern Belle;<br>White: Candy, Savannah Sweet; Vidalia: Candy Ann, Caramelo, Century, Georgia Boy, Mata Hari | ½ inch         | 4-6            | 85   |
| Spinach          | Bloomsdale Long Standing, Melody, Tyee, Unipak 151  | ⅝ inch         | 3-6            | 35-45  |
| Radishes         | Cherriette, Champion, White Icicle, April Cross   | ⅝ inch         | 1              | 22-28  |
| Shallots         | Matador, Prism  | 1 inch         | 4-8            | 50   |
| Swiss Chard      | None Given  | ¼ inch         | 6-8            | 45-55  |
| Turnip Greens    | Alamo, All Top, Purple, Top White Globe, Seven Top, Southern Green, Top Star, Tokyo Cross                                       | ⅝ inch         | 2-6            | 40-50  |
| Tomatoes (seeds) | Bella Rosa, Fletcher, Tribute, BHN 1021, Amelia, Dixie Red  | ⅝ inch         | --             | 100-115                                      |

# Winter Rose Care

It would be hard to dispute that the most popular summer-flowering shrub is the rose. Most roses need at least some annual pruning to maintain an attractive shape, remove dead wood and encourage vigorous growth and blooming. This is generally done from the last week of January (south Louisiana) through mid-February (north Louisiana).



Pruning back roses takes some getting used to. Many new gardeners have a hard time getting up the nerve to cut their bushes back. If you don't, however, the result will be tall, rangy, overgrown bushes that will not be nearly as attractive. It is far easier for you and healthier for the rose bush if you do this pruning regularly. Don't forget that we also do a second, but not as severe, pruning in late summer around the end of August.

## Hybrid tea and grandiflora roses

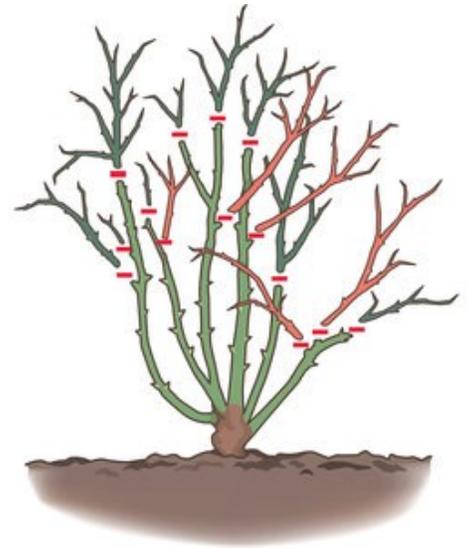
Use sharp by-pass type hand pruners, which make clean cuts and minimize damage to the stems. Wear a sturdy pair of leather gloves and long sleeves because no matter how careful you are, thorny roses can painfully puncture or scratch your hands and arms. Should you need to cut canes larger than one-half-inch in diameter, you should use loppers.

First, prune out all diseased or dead canes, cutting them back to their point of origin. Weak, spindly canes the diameter of a pencil or less should also be removed

Special rose gloves are longer than regular gardening gloves to protect the forearm from

the same way. A good rose bush should have four to eight strong, healthy canes the diameter of your finger or larger after this first step. (See Figure 1.)

Cut back the remaining canes to about 24 inches from ground level. Newly purchased roses have already been pruned, and no further pruning is required. When you prune back a cane, make the cut about one-quarter inch above a dormant bud or newly sprouted side shoot. Try to cut back to buds that face outward, away from the center of the bush. The new shoot produced by this bud will grow outward, opening up the bush for light, air and orderly growth. This may seem picky, but this really does make a difference.



## Pruning other types of roses

Old garden roses that are everblooming, landscape roses (such as the popular Knock Out roses), floribunda roses and polyantha roses may also be pruned now. These roses, in general, have more pleasing shapes without severe pruning. They are only lightly shaped under most circumstances, unless there is a need to control their size.

You should still check for any dead wood and prune that out. Excessively long, vigorous shoots growing out of the bush should be headed back to within the boundary of the bush to keep the shape attractive. Other than that, how far back you cut old garden roses depends on the situation, vigor of the bush and the desired size.

(Continued on the following page)

## Winter Rose Care (continued)

It is typical to cut back old garden roses and landscape roses about a third of their height. Any roses that are not everblooming – including many climbing and rambling roses, such as Lady Banks, Dorothy Perkins and Blaze, and some old garden varieties – should not be pruned now. These roses produce their flowers in one big gush during late spring and early summer on growth made the previous year, and then bear few or no flowers the rest of the year. If pruned back hard now, they will produce few, if any, flowers. If extensive pruning is necessary, it is best done in midsummer after they have finished flowering. In addition, these types of roses should not be pruned hard each year like modern bush roses. Pruning climbers and ramblers is largely determined by how large and on what structure they are being trained. Pruning, when done, is more selective and less extensive.

### Planting roses

Most nurseries already have rose bushes in stock, and now through March is a good time to plant. If you intend to plant bare-root roses, get them planted before the end of February. Bare-root rose bushes should be planted before they begin to sprout.

Early planting allows rose bushes to become established before they begin to bloom. This increases the number and quality of flowers, and the bush is better prepared to deal with summer heat when it arrives. Plant roses in a sunny, well-prepared bed that has excellent drainage. For more information on growing roses in Louisiana, the LSU AgCenter offers “Roses Selection, Planting and Care,” a publication available at your local LSU AgCenter office or online.

### On the move

Now is also a good time to transplant roses from one location to another in the landscape. Cool weather reduces the stress of transplant shock brought on by damage to the roots when the plant is moved and increases your chances of success.

Care must be taken to disturb the root system as little as possible when moving roses. Dig plants with a ball of soil around their roots, getting as many of the roots as possible. If the soil falls away, do not let the roots dry out. Moisten the roots and wrap them in plastic, a garbage bag or damp fabric, get the plants to their new location, and plant them immediately. Make sure you plant them in their new location at their original growing depth, and water them thoroughly after planting to settle the plant in. Be sure to water regularly over the next few weeks and then during any dry periods over the next few months. ~Dan Gill



Roses may be purchased as bare root plants or grown in containers. Plant bare root roses from now to the end of February. Container grown roses may be planted as late as April.

## Volunteer Spotlight



**Karen Romig** - has only been a Louisiana Master Gardener since 2012 but she has been doing volunteer work since she was a teenager. Since moving to New Orleans she has continued her efforts by volunteering throughout the New Orleans community including New Orleans City Park, the New Orleans Museum of Art, and as a mentor for incoming students at Newcomb College. Most recently, Karen, has been the president of the Master Gardeners of Greater New Orleans organization. As president she says that her greatest accomplishment was organizing the 2016 LMG state conference. She said, "It is amazing to describe the support that came from our local Louisiana Master Gardeners and from across the State of Louisiana, in a time when we needed to come together."

Karen said that her inspiration for gardening came from her grandmother. She said that when she was a child, her grandmother taught her how to plant bulbs in the garden and then to share the flowers with their neighbors when they bloomed. Since then Karen says that she uses her experience as an artist and designer to combine color and texture in her own garden. She says the hardest lesson was learning new plants and techniques that work in our local 9-10 growing zone compared to the zone 6 that she was used to. This is when Karen first became aware of the Master Gardener program. When she saw what they had learned and were able to share with her and others in the community she knew she wanted to join as well.

## Plant of the Month

*Loropetalum chinense* - is a native plant of China that was first introduced to the US in 1880. This is a versatile plant that grows well in zones 7-10. The preferred growing conditions include sun to partial shade and moist, well-drained, acidic soil with plenty of organic matter. Once established, they are very tolerant of drought conditions. Loropetalums may be grown as a low shrub or trained to



A loropetalum trained as a small multi-trunk tree.



Fuchsia blossoms of the Loropetalum.

be a small tree.

There are many varieties available offering a selection of sizes, leaf color, and flower color. The most notable feature of the loropetalum are the masses of vibrant pink or white blossoms covering the plants at this time of year. Although they require little maintenance, occasional pruning may be necessary to maintain the desired size and shape. When necessary, prune after blooming so as not to reduce flowering.

Interested in learning how to create a backyard habitat to attract birds, bees, butterflies and beneficial bugs? Join us January 28th at NOMA for an extraordinary program with leading national and local experts in native plant gardening for wildlife. Tickets still available at <http://www.mggno.org/symposium>.

LOUISIANA



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## Master Gardeners of Greater New Orleans

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### The Living Louisiana Landscape

*Cultivating relationships with people, plants and wildlife*

Presented by Master Gardeners of Greater New Orleans and LSU AgCenter

### Winter Gardening Symposium

Saturday, January 28, 2017

8:00 A.M. to Noon

New Orleans Museum of Art Auditorium, City Park

Join award-winning authors and lecturers **Doug Tallamy** and **Rick Darke** along with local landscape horticulturist and master gardener, **Tammany Baumgarten**, for three inspiring presentations illustrating how to integrate beauty and biodiversity in your home garden through native plants that nurture Louisiana wildlife. You'll learn how to recognize and enrich the layers of your landscape to create an ecosystem that is diverse, visually appealing and sustaining on many levels.

**Designing and Maintaining the Living Landscape.** Discover how an understanding of living relationships can be put to practical use in the design and maintenance of beautiful gardens that are biologically diverse and joyfully livable. Rick Darke will share strategies for employing "organic architecture" in creating beautiful, conserving, highly functional layers that can be found in the Bayou country and other parts of the southeastern U.S.

**Restoring Nature's Relationships at Home.** Specialized relationships between animals and plants provide our birds with insects and berries, disperse our bloodroot seeds and pollinate our plants. Learn why specialized food relationships determine the stability and complexity that support animal diversity, why our yards and gardens are essential parts of the ecosystems that sustain us, and what we can do to make our landscapes living ecosystems once again.

**My Weeds, My Bugs, My Home.** Tammany Baumgarten will share wisdom and discoveries from her years of gardening research and experimentation in and around New Orleans. You'll learn about naturalistic garden design in the reality of small-scale urban lots, including specific methods and plants that have proved successful in drawing and sustaining insect life in our city setting. She will finally address some paths forward to a greater good in our neighborhoods, city and state.

Your morning of learning will include a continental breakfast from Café NOMA, raffle of a stunning gallery of garden wildlife wreaths designed by master gardeners, complimentary admission to NOMA immediately following the program and an opportunity to enjoy the beautiful Besthoff Sculpture Garden adjoining the museum.

**Registration fee is \$35.00.** Plus you'll have the option to purchase a specially-discounted copy of *The Living Landscape* signed by co-authors Doug Tallamy and Rick Darke. Please go to [mggno.org/symposium](http://mggno.org/symposium) for complete details and to register securely online through our Eventbrite site.

Have a question? Call **504-908-2018** or email [symposium@mggno.org](mailto:symposium@mggno.org). Follow us on [Facebook.com/MasterGardenersOfGreaterNewOrleans](https://www.facebook.com/MasterGardenersOfGreaterNewOrleans) for updates and the latest news about our 2017 Winter Gardening Symposium.

### Master Gardeners of Greater New Orleans

Our Mission: To increase the public's love and knowledge of gardening and responsible stewardship of the environment.

## Flower Shows Spread the Joy of Gardening

Last month I was invited to participate in the Spirit of the Season Flower Show at the botanical gardens. The show is hosted by the Jefferson Parish Council of Garden Clubs, Inc. and the Federated Council of New Orleans Garden Clubs, Inc. The show serves as a showcase for floral design, horticultural specimens, and educational exhibits about garden projects taking place in the area. The Garden Club of America and the National Garden Club provide a guidebook for judging flowers and horticultural exhibits as well as training for judges. Local clubs are encouraged to host flower shows as a way of connecting to the public, a way to share the many interesting things from their gardens, as well as create some good healthy competition!

Horticultural exhibits showcase specimens from member's gardens in a variety of categories, including potted plants, orchids, cut flowers, cut leaf/branches, collections, and more. It was fascinating to see so many varieties of one plant laid out on a judging table and neatly labeled with the botanical name and cultivar. Each exhibit was judged and awarded a placing, with classes in a category competing for a large rosette. Choosing the best flower or best leaf to showcase sounded very interesting and challenging! There were a lot of unusual specimens from member's gardens.



Floral arranging is a creative class and utilizes fresh plant material, lots of florist's wire, and an artistic eye. There are many categories, including miniature arrangements, formal place settings and centerpieces, formal arrangements, hanging arrangements, large floor arrangements, and more. There are some loose guidelines for designing a creative floral arrangement, but really the scope of the entry is only limited by the designer's ideas! Lee Rouse and I were invited to compete in the Creative Line Design category, which uses a minimum of plant material while creating an abstract design using line as the focal point. The line or movement can be upward, horizontal, diagonal, or even circular. The theme was "The Nutcracker", or specifically "The Prince and the Sugar Plum Fairy".

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# January Gardening Checklist

Mild weather will encourage enthusiastic growth from cool season weeds in the lawn. Since the lawn grass is dormant and mowing is not being done, the green weeds are really noticeable against the tan dormant turf. Do not reach for a bag of weed and feed (fertilizer combined with a weed killer). It is far too early to fertilize warm season grasses. After all, they're dormant. If you must control the weeds use a broad leaf herbicide labeled for use on the type of grass you have, following label directions carefully. Most of these weeds will disappear when the weather turns hot and the lawn greens up. In many cases you can skip the herbicide and just mow the weeds down occasionally.

Whenever practical, continue to deadhead cool season annuals such as pansies, snapdragons and dianthus to keep them blooming through the spring.

Pansies and other cool season bedding plants may bloom less during the mid-winter period but should pick-up again in the late winter and early spring. If the foliage color is a good deep green and the plants seem to be growing well, you shouldn't need to fertilize now. Pansies are, however, heavy feeders. If the foliage is even slightly pale and if the growth is less vigorous, fertilize every two to three weeks with a 20-20-20 soluble fertilizer according to label directions until the color and vigor improves.

Root crops, such as radish, carrot, turnip and beet, should be direct seeded right where they will grow this month. Young plants may need some protection from temperatures below the mid-twenties.

Harvest green bunching onions by digging up the entire clump, separating off half for use and replant the other half back into the garden for continued production. Harvest cabbage when the head feel very solid and hard.

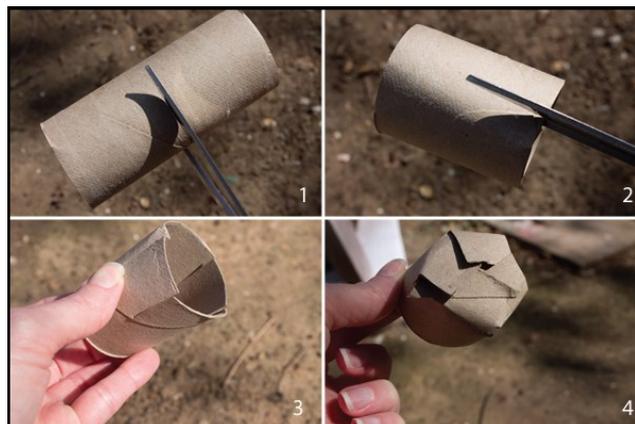
## Flower Shows (continued)

Working from those ideas, I created a design using two chrysanthemums, willow branches, and a lovely blue *Eryngium* thistle. There were also some small beads and two Louisiana pecans to help tie the arrangement to the theme.

The show was well attended by botanical garden visitors, club members, invited guests, and school children. Refreshments were served and there was a lot of great garden talk, swapping of ideas, and admiration for member's talents and amazing plant samples. I would highly encourage anyone to join their local garden club soon. It is a great way to get involved in another area of horticulture, to share enthusiasm for our hobby, and to really dive in to the competitive flower show world! ~ Anna Timmerman

## Starting Tomatoes from Seed

To start tomatoes from seed, obtain a good potting soil and fill cups, peat pots, clay pots or flats with the potting medium. Make a hole about 1/4 inch deep, drop two seeds in and cover them. Moisten the mixture and keep the temperature about 70 to 80 degrees F. After the seeds germinate, expose plants to as much sunlight as possible to prevent them from becoming spindly. If plants begin to become spindly, water less often and try to provide more sunlight. About eight weeks are required to produce a plant of transplant size. Top quality tomato plants for transplanting are about 6 to 10 inches tall with straight, sturdy stems about the size of a lead pencil. The plant should have a healthy, large root system and large, fully expanded leaves.



Seed trays can be purchased or made from repurposed household items like toilet paper rolls.

# January Gardening Checklist

Planting cool season vegetables and bedding plants continues. Although exceptionally cold weather can cause problems, winter weather is mostly mild. Watch the weather and avoid setting out transplants when a hard freeze below the upper 20s is predicted.

During cold of winter weather the water coming out of the tap can be decidedly chilly. When filling up your watering can to water your indoor plants, don't just turn on the cold water tap. Turn on both cold and hot water and adjust the temperature of the water coming out of the faucet until it feels tepid or barely warm. This is healthier for tropical houseplants and will prevent the spotting of African violet foliage.

Regularly mow overseeded rye lawns at a height of one and one-half inches to keep them looking attractive.

Resolve to pick more flowers from your garden for indoor arrangements this year. Most gardeners are too reluctant to harvest the flowers growing in their gardens, when flowers can enrich our home interiors in wonderful ways. Think how nice it would be to have a little vase of pansies, snapdragons or stock on the table beside you right now.

After your Holiday cactus plant stops blooming, don't forget to move it into a sunny window for the rest of the winter. Keep it evenly moist but not constantly wet as this promotes root rot. In April, you may move it to a spot outside that receives morning sun for the summer.

You must plant any spring flowering bulbs you have been refrigerating by early January, or you will be too late. You cannot keep the bulbs, such as tulips and hyacinths, and plant them next year

Now is a good time to make hardwood cuttings of such plants as pears, figs, roses and hydrangeas. Cuttings should be taken from the ends of branches and be 6 to 8 inches long.

Bare root rose bushes are arriving at local nurseries and garden centers. If you choose to plant bare root roses, January is the month to do it, or by the end of February at the latest. Containerized roses may also be planted as soon as they become available at the nurseries, but can be planted as late as April.

Add leaves falling from deciduous trees to your compost pile as they become available. Speed decomposition by chopping the leaves and sprinkling some nitrogen fertilizer over the leaves as you build the pile. Keep the piles evenly moist but not soggy. Turning the pile occasionally will also speed decomposition.

## Your Local Extension Office is Here to Help

E-mail us at: [GNOGardening@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:GNOGardening@agcenter.lsu.edu)



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