

# Horticulture Hints



Winter 2008-2009



## Landscape Gardening and Ornamentals

### 2008 All-America Selections Winners

All-America Selections is a nonprofit organization that tests newly developed cultivars of bedding plants and vegetables in garden plots all across the United States. Duplicating conditions in the average home garden, the testing program is independent and unbiased. AAS was founded in 1932, and the first AAS winners were announced a year later, after the results were tabulated for the first trial. AAS winners have been introduced each year since 1933, and AAS continues as the oldest, most established international testing organization in North America.

As always, the 2009 AAS winners were judged in side-by-side comparison tests with standard cultivars and were selected based entirely on the plants' performance. Only those few cultivars that demonstrate unique new characteristics, exceptional productivity and superior garden performance make the All-American Selections list each year.

So, when it comes to bedding plants and vegetables, those that are All-America Selection Winners are generally considered good choices. That's not to say that every winner is going to be an outstanding choice for Louisiana, and we may use them differently than gardeners in other parts of the country. For 2009, four winners have been named.

#### AAS Cool-Season Bedding Plant Award Winner

Viola Rain Blue and Purple creates a spreading pool of cool blue colors in flowerbeds and containers. The plants are cold-tolerant and are best used as cool-season bedding plants in Louisiana. Plant transplants from November through March.



Like other violas, Rain Blue and Purple produces smaller flowers than pansies. Don't let this stop you from giving them a try as they produce flowers in such great quantities their color impact in the landscape is outstanding. An especially appealing trait of this viola is that the one and one-half-inch blooms change color from purple and white to purple and blue as they mature. Few flowers change colors naturally, and Rain Blue and Purple is a lovely example. The 6-inch-tall plants spread 10 to 14 inches in the garden or container. The trailing habit is perfectly suited for hanging baskets or patio containers.

#### AAS Vegetable Award Winner

Eggplant Gretel is the earliest white eggplant available. Early production means beating the intense heat of summer that can sometimes reduce harvests. The glossy white mini-fruit are produced in clusters and can be harvested in 55 days after transplanting, depending upon growing conditions. Like all eggplants, Gretel will grow rapidly under warm temperatures. Transplants are best planted into the garden in mid to late April or early May. The pure white fruit contain few seeds and are sweet with tender skin even if they mature beyond the ideal fruit size of 3 to 4 inches. This trait means gardeners have a longer timeline to harvest fruit. Gretel plants are relatively small, about 3 feet wide and tall. This smaller size makes it adaptable to the popular trend of growing edibles in containers. It is recommended to use a rather large container, about 16 inches deep.



#### AAS Vegetable Award Winner

Melons are all about sweet juicy flesh and excellent flavor, and Lambkin produces melons with the delicious

taste gardeners crave. The oval melon weighs between 2 and 4 pounds and has a thin rind surrounding sweet, aromatic, white, juicy flesh.

Another outstanding characteristic is the earliness. Most other gourmet melons of this type mature much later than the 65 to 75 days of Lambkin. Because of the early harvest, the vigorous vines can produce more melons. This results in more melons to share with friends, if you can stand to let any go. The yellow melon skin with green mottling is unique. Lambkin stores well and can be stored longer than other melons in a cool place such as a refrigerator. Seeds are best planted in the garden in April. The vigorous vines grow 6 feet or more.



#### AAS Vegetable Award Winner

Acorn squash Honey Bear was bred to be baked and served in the half shell. The honey in 'Honey Bear' refers to the sweet squash flavor when cooked. In addition to flavor, it has three outstanding qualities: being compact, high yielding and tolerant to powdery mildew. The bushy plant reaches 2 to 3 feet tall and spreads 4 to 5 feet without vines. Each plant can be expected to produce about 3 to 5 fruit. The dark green acorn squash weighs about a pound, which is a perfect size for sharing between two people. The yield is high due to the powdery mildew tolerance. At the end of the season many acorn squash plants succumb to the mildew and fruit on the plant never matures. Honey Bear continues to bear fruit through the growing season. From sowing until harvest of the first squash is about 100 days.



## Louisiana Master Gardener Program

The Louisiana Master Gardener Co-operative Extension Service volunteer program, an educational program of the LSU AgCenter, offers the public a wonderful combination of horticultural training and leadership opportunities. Participants not only become better gardeners, they learn how to help the youth and adults with gardening needs.

Classes are offered in more than 20 parishes, with 46 parishes benefiting from Master Gardener volunteer involvement. Classes offer 40 to 50 hours of instruction in a variety of interesting topics. As a Master Gardener, you will learn about insects and diseases, ornamental plants, fruits and vegetables, as well as how to diagnose plant problems. In addition, you will have the opportunity for increasing your leadership skills. After successful completion of the training, participants are asked to volunteer their time and share their knowledge by assisting with the parish's extension horticultural education outreach program.

The Louisiana Master Gardener program is based on volunteer service within the community. Volunteers do make a difference as they recommend noncommercial research-based gardening information at community events, parish fairs, plant clinics, school programs, garden shows and civic meetings. Citizens throughout the state are experiencing the satisfaction of being Louisiana Master Gardener volunteers.

For more information, contact your parish LSU AgCenter Extension office or visit [www.lsuagcenter.com](http://www.lsuagcenter.com) and click on Lawn & Garden and then on Master Gardener Program. You can be in the next Louisiana Master Gardener class so I encourage you to sign up today.

*Bobby Fletcher Jr., Ph.D.*



An educational program of the LSU AgCenter

## Avoid Landscaping Practices That Encourage Termites

Although now is an excellent time for adding hardy trees, shrubs and ground covers to the landscape, it is also a time to be cautious about creating problems that could bring termites into your home. LSU AgCenter experts suggest the following to reduce the possibility of termite problems.

- Situate gutters and slope your landscape beds so that water drains away from your house.
- Keep mulch in beds adjacent to the house about 12 inches from the foundation.
- Do not add fill dirt or garden soil around the foundation or under porches or steps without contacting your termite company for retreatment.
- Do not disturb the chemical barrier at the base of the slab or around pilings by digging into it during bed preparation.
- Promptly remove all scrap wood and wooden debris from the landscape.
- Pine straw appears to be the mulch that is least attractive to termites. Avoid using wood chips to mulch beds adjacent to the house or other structures.
- Use metal edging, decorative bricks or border plants to edge your beds. Avoid landscape timbers, railroad ties or other wooden materials that may serve as food for termites.
- When watering, avoid spraying water against the foundation of your house.
- Leave at least 2 inches of space between your house and a deck or other wooden structure outside. Build decks and other structures on concrete pads and treat around the pads/posts.
- Do not allow clinging vines, such as English ivy or creeping fig to grow on the wall of your house.



## Holiday Cactus

Thanksgiving cactuses and Christmas cactuses have been hybridized with each other to the point that we now group today's cultivars together under the catchall name holiday cactus. They bloom from November through January. They are commonly purchased this time of year for holiday decoration. Place them near a bright, sunny window and keep the soil evenly moist. It is quite common for these plants to drop flower buds when you get them home, but there is little that you can do. These plants resent being moved at all while blooming, much less being packaged, shipped, unwrapped, displayed, purchased and taken home. But, many blooms and buds will hold on, and their great beauty in shades of magenta, red, pink, orange, gold or white make their purchase worth it.

When they finish blooming, these plants should not be discarded. Holiday cactus will reward you with blooms every year for many years if grown correctly. After all the flowers have dropped off, allow the soil to become fairly dry before watering, and keep the plant in a bright window. An east or west window will provide plenty of light. This plant is a beautiful and easily grown houseplant. Even out of bloom, the flattened, jointed stems arch over attractively. They also will thrive on a porch or patio in a semishaded position during the summer. They are triggered to bloom by long nights and chilly nighttime temperatures in the 50s. The easiest way to get a plant to bloom again is to place it outdoors (if you have been growing it inside) where it will get a little morning sun and shade the rest of the day. Leave it outside, allowing the progressively longer and cooler nights to initiate buds to form (do not leave the plant out on a night when a freeze is predicted, however). Allow the soil to dry before watering. Once you see little flower buds at the tip of the branches, move the plant into a bright window inside and keep the soil evenly moist.

## Enjoy Holiday Plants

Among the special pleasures associated with the holiday season, decorative plants such as poinsettias, holiday cactuses and living Christmas trees play an important part in decking the halls for the holidays. How well you care for them will determine how long they will stay attractive.

After purchasing a holiday plant, be sure to protect it while bringing it home. Sudden exposure to low temperatures and wind will damage the plant. Poinsettias are particularly fragile, so handle them with care. It's best to have them sleeved before you take them out of the store. When you get them home, the plants should be located for attractive display, but a spot where they will receive some natural light will give best results.

Holiday plants are often sold in pots wrapped in decorative coverings. Punch holes in the covering where the drainage holes of the pot are located to allow the soil to drain properly when you water. This prevents the roots from becoming water logged. Make sure the furniture or floor you set your plant on is protected by a plastic saucer. Another option is to remove the pot from the decorative covering, take the plant to sink, water it and allow it to drain there, then return it back to the location where you are displaying it and slip it back into the decorative pot cover. The water needs of your plants should be checked every day by feeling the soil with your finger. Water thoroughly when the soil begins to feel somewhat dry. Never let a holiday plant wilt.

Allowing a plant to dry out, low light, low humidity, drafts and placing them near sources of heat can all shorten the attractive life of your holiday plant. With a little care and attention, you can make sure that your holiday plant will provide a beautiful display throughout the season.

## Pruning Roses

In Louisiana, roses are generally pruned twice a year – the last week in January (South Louisiana) to mid-February (North Louisiana) and again in late August to early September. The classic pruning technique for hybrid teas and grandifloras encourages the production of high-quality flowers with long stems for cutting. This involves rather hard pruning, back to 18 to 24 inches in the late winter and 24 to 30 inches in the late summer. Currently, recommendations are more relaxed and involve less severe pruning. Floribundas, polyanthas shrub roses, miniatures and old garden roses require only moderate pruning to shape them and remove dead wood.

Roses are pruned primarily to remove dead wood, stimulate new growth and control size and shape. Cut the bush back to the desired height (usually 2 to 3 feet for hybrid teas and grandifloras). Remove all dead wood, diseased canes and twiggy growth. Cut each remaining cane back to just above a bud (preferably facing away from the middle of the bush).

Some rose cultivars (ramblers, some climbers and some old garden roses) bloom prolifically in the spring and early summer and then stop. These roses bloom on growth they made the summer before and generally are not as popular as repeat blooming roses that bloom all summer. They should be pruned, as needed, in early to mid-summer soon after they finish their bloom season. Do not prune them now or you will reduce or eliminate flowering this spring.

## Spring-flowering Trees Brighten Landscapes

Flowering trees will add so much color and beauty to our landscapes over the next few months, and now through early March is an excellent time to plant these and other types of trees.

The Taiwan flowering cherry (*Prunus campanulata*) blooms in late January or February. The attractive flowers are vibrant, deep pink and are produced in great abundance before the leaves emerge. This is one of the few flowering cherries



that grows and blooms reliably this far south. The Okame flowering cherry is another type that will grow successfully in Louisiana and is especially recommended for North Louisiana because it blooms later and the flowers are less likely to be damaged by a freeze. Pale pink flowers are produced in March or April.

The Oriental magnolia (*Magnolia x soulangiana*) is one of the most spectacular of the spring-flowering trees because its flowers are so large. Unlike the evergreen Southern magnolia, the Oriental magnolia is deciduous and loses its leaves in winter. Appearing before the foliage in February, the fragrant flowers are tulip-shaped, 4 to 6 inches across and may be flushed pale pink to purple on the outside and white on the inside. Long-lived and reliable, Oriental magnolias grow 15 to 20 feet tall and need a sunny, well-drained location.

The related star magnolia (*Magnolia stellata*) is smaller, growing 10 to 12 feet tall, and is more shrub-like. The white or pale pink flowers are star-shaped and wonderfully fragrant. Blooming in late January or February before the foliage, the star magnolia is an excellent choice for small gardens.

The native silver bell (*Halesia diptera*) is a lovely tree that produces small four-petaled white flowers that hang down in large numbers from the branches. The thin leaves allow light to filter through, creating a lovely effect under the tree. Silver bells thrive in Louisiana and, once established, grow rapidly, maturing at about 25 to 30 feet. They grow well with light shade or in full sun.

The hawthorns are a wonderful group of native trees that provide spring bloom as well as fruit for human or wildlife consumption. Growing 15 to 20 feet tall, the parsley hawthorn (*Crataegus marshallii*) is an excellent choice in patio or small plantings. The clusters of white flowers appear in March or April and are soon followed by the foliage, which looks like flat Italian parsley. The small red fruit that ripen in fall are relished by mockingbirds. Parsley hawthorn is tolerant of poorly drained soils and grows in full sun to part shade.

The American fringe tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*) produces clusters of flowers with long, narrow, greenish-white petals that are produced in masses all along the branches. The narrow petals and hanging habit give the flowers a fringe or beardlike appearance. In the wild, you usually see them growing on the edge of the woods; they thrive in full sun to partial shade in well-drained locations. The Chinese fringe tree (*Chionanthus retusus*) also grows well here and is even showier than our native species.

Another excellent spring-flowering tree is the redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), which usually blooms in late February or March. Small, pinkish purple pealike flowers are produced in unbelievable profusion along the branches (and even on the trunk!) before the leaves appear. This habit of blooming before the leaves grow out is fairly common among the spring-flowering trees and really adds to the impact of the flowers. Redbuds are relatively fast growing once established and prefer full sun and a well-drained location.

## Yellow Leaves Are Not Always a Problem

Yellow leaves commonly show up on a wide variety of shrubs from fall through spring. Although the condition may look alarming, in most cases the yellowing leaves do not indicate a problem.

Here in the Deep South, we tend to use a large number of broadleaf evergreen trees and shrubs in our landscapes. These plants, such as gardenia, azalea, Southern magnolia, cherry laurel, Indian hawthorn, camellia, hollies, ligustrum, sweet olive, banana shrub, cleyera, viburnum and others, do not lose all of their leaves during winter and are green year-round. This allows our landscapes to look green and attractive, even in the depths of winter.

Leaves on these plants do, however, eventually grow old, die and are dropped from the plant. Before old leaves drop, they often turn bright yellow, orange or red. Note that the affected leaves are generally the ones located farthest from the ends of the branches. As many as one-third of the leaves on a plant may be dropped at one time, but the amount of leaf drop varies greatly from year to year.

This dropping of old, worn-out leaves generally occurs sometime between November and May, depending on the type of plant. Gardenias yellow and drop older leaves in October and again in spring; azaleas generally drop leaves in December and January. Hollies yellow and drop leaves in March or April, just as or before new growth appears, and gardenias and Southern magnolias yellow and drop leaves in April or May.



## Checklist for December, January and February

1. Daffodils can be planted through late December. Excellent cultivars are Ice Follies, Fortune, Carlton and Unsurpassable.
2. Remove old flowers from your cool-season bedding plants to extend blooming and improve flower performance.
3. Plant gladiolus in late February in South Louisiana. Prolong the blooming season by planting at 2- to 3-week intervals for a couple of months.
4. Mulch shrub and flower beds to get plants off to a good spring start and minimize weed problems.
5. Watch azaleas in February for lacebugs. They cause the foliage to have numerous small white spots and feed underneath lower foliage. Control with horticultural oil sprays or Orthene.
6. A late winter planting of petunias will provide a good flower show for early spring. Consider the Wave series.
7. Winter is a great time for planting trees. Some excellent native species for Louisiana include Nuttall oak, Shumard oak, winged elm, Southern red oak, willow oak, red maple, Southern magnolia, bald cypress and mayhaw.
8. February is the ideal time to fertilize trees.
9. January and February are good months to prune landscape trees and any deciduous and evergreen plants that don't flower in the spring.
10. Clean and sharpen tools before you put them away. Wipe the metal blades with an oily cloth that coats them with a thin layer of protective oil to help prevent corrosion. Coat wooden handles with protectants such as a sealer, tung oil or varnish.
11. February is a good time to plant container or bare root roses. Bare root rose bushes should be planted by the end of February. Early planting allows rose bushes to become established in their new location before they begin to bloom. This increases the number and quality of flowers, and the bush is more prepared to deal with summer heat when it arrives in May. Plant roses in sunny, well-prepared beds that have excellent drainage.



*Dan Gill*

## Vegetables to plant in December . . .

Onions (transplant), shallots (sets or green transplants), lettuce, spinach, endive, escarole and cabbage (seed or transplant). Root crops and greens may be started. Cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts and cauliflower seed may be planted in South Louisiana coldframes or protected areas to produce transplants for spring harvest. Start shiitake mushrooms or at least cut the mushroom logs. Order seeds now for 2009 garden crops.

## . . . and in January

Beets, carrots, radishes, turnips, cabbage, broccoli, mustard, spinach, kale and Irish potatoes.

Transplant onions, shallots and celery.

Start shiitake mushroom logs or cut logs while dormant.

Seed in coldframe, hotbed, greenhouse in January: tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, cabbage, broccoli, Chinese cabbage, cauliflower and lettuce.

## . . . and in February

Beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, turnips, mustard, spinach, parsley, Chinese cabbage, radishes, Irish potatoes, leaf lettuce, head lettuce, tomatoes, eggplants, snap beans and sweet corn in extreme South Louisiana the last part of the month.

Transplant broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, head lettuce and shallots. Plant seed sweet potatoes on warm (70 degrees) raised beds for slips.



## Crop Highlights

**Onions.** Transplant pencil-size onion plants from mid-December through January. Fertilize with 4 to 5 pounds of a complete fertilizer such as 8-24-24 or 13-13-13 per 100 feet of row about 2 weeks before transplanting. Space plants about 3 inches to 4 inches apart in the row. Several drills may be planted on a row with 6-inch to 12-inch spacing between drills.

Sidedress onions, shallots and garlic when growth starts in or early February. Use 1 pound of ammonium nitrate per 100 feet of row. Two additional sidedressings at 2-week to 3-week intervals will increase bulb size.

Onions, shallots, leeks and garlic do not compete well with weeds. To control weeds in onions, especially with postemergence materials like Poast, make all treatments by mid-November to early December. Once the cool, wet weather sets in, it's hard to control weeds. Spray onions, shallots and garlic with malathion to control thrips.

**Shallots.** Shallot sets can be planted any time in winter. If you have some growing in the garden, replant several as you harvest by separating plants and cutting them back and re-transplanting them. They will continue to divide and make several more plants. By doing this, you can have shallots through spring. Separate plants in December and January for next year's sets if they are crowded.

**Tomatoes.** December is a good time to look through seed catalogs. Recommended vine varieties are Big Beef, Champion, Terrific, Monte Carlo, First Lady, Husky Gold, Sun Gold, Better Boy, Jet Star (low-acid) and Pink Girl.

Recommended bush types are Sunleaper, Celebrity, Daybreak, Merced, Quincy, Amelia, Crista, Floralina, Bella Rosa, Mountain Fresh, Mountain Delight, Mountain Spring, Mountain Crest, Summer Flavor 6000, Sunbeam and Florida 47. Other varieties are Crimson Plum, Spectrum 882, Niagra Belle, Mountain Belle, Jolly, Cherry Grande, Sweet Chelseas, Elfin, Sweet Million, Juliet, Macero II Roma, BHN 685, Spectrum 882 and Muriel.

Nurseries and garden centers are encouraged to handle some of the newer varieties. Try some Crista, Quincy or Amelia as spotted-wilt-virus-resistant tomatoes.

**Cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower and Chinese cabbage.** Cabbage planted now may encounter low temperatures. Temperatures in the low 20s will injure some of the cabbage, and lower temperatures will freeze many varieties. Recommended varieties for winter production are Bravo, Solid Blue 780 and 790, Cheers, Blue Vantage, Quisto, A&C #5+, A&C #5 and Rio Verde. A&C #5 is the hardiest. For reds, try Cardinal, Red Dynasty or Red Rookie.

Bolting in cabbage often occurs in Louisiana. Bolting is caused by exposure of plants to daily temperatures of around 45 degrees and lower for several weeks. Flower stalks may not show until heads begin to form.

These cole crops will usually produce well in Louisiana in the spring, but time is important, especially with cauliflower and broccoli. They need to be planted early enough to produce before temperatures get too high.

Each of these vegetables can be planted directly in the field in January, but cauliflower and Chinese cabbage should not be transplanted out until February.

**Irish potatoes.** Begin planting Irish potatoes around mid-January in South Louisiana and around the first of February in North Louisiana. Fertilize at the rate of 7 to 8 pounds of a complete fertilizer (8-8-8, 13-13-13) or 4 to 5 pounds of 8-24-24 per 100 feet of row before planting. Sidedress with 1 pint of ammonium nitrate when plants are 8 inches tall.

Cut seed potatoes into blocky pieces that weigh about 1 1/2 to 2 ounces each or are about the size of an egg. Be sure each seed piece has at least one eye; this is where the plant will originate. Place cut side down. Irish potato plants may be nipped back by a light frost, but damage is usually not serious, and new growth will be produced. Plant seed pieces 10 to 15 inches apart in the row. Between 7 and 8 pounds of seed potatoes will plant 100 feet of row.

The red skin varieties recommended for Louisiana are Red LaSoda, LaRouge, Fontenot and Norland. Recommended white skin varieties are LaChipper, LaBelle, Norchip, Atlantic, Kennebec and Sebago. Generally, Red LaSoda and Kennebec are the most readily available.

LaBelle is a white, smooth-skin variety released by the LSU AgCenter. It combines a high-yielding ability with excellent chipping and cooking quality. Fontenot, a high-yielding red skin variety, is the most recent released by the LSU AgCenter.



## Turfgrass and Lawns

December begins a bleak time for warm-season turfgrasses. Most turfgrasses should be dormant or at least close to this stage. Because the grasses are not actively growing, nitrogen fertilization should cease on home lawns unless they are overseeded with ryegrass. Nitrogen fertilizer on dormant turfgrasses can lead to increased brown patch and winterkill. Also, nitrogen applications during this time have a greater potential for movement into groundwater.

Although many home lawns do not require regular mowing or fertilization, now is an excellent time to have your soil tested. Bring 1 pint of soil to your parish LSU AgCenter office. Soil samples should be a composite of soil plugs 4 inches in depth from various places around the lawn. Specify the type of grass you are growing.

If you have chosen to overseed with ryegrass, apply 2 to 3 pounds of ammonium nitrate or equivalent fertilizer per 1,000 square feet every 4 to 6 weeks to maintain desired growth and color. Postpone any permanent warm-season turfgrass establishment from seed until next spring. Sod, such as St. Augustine, can be laid during winter if necessary, but remember to keep it moist to prevent drying out and dying. Establishment is best left until mid-spring, well after spring green-up.

Brown patch diseases can come and go throughout the winter if the weather is mild. Treatment with fungicides containing chlorothalonil, captan, chloroneb, fenarimal, fludioxonil, flutolanil, iprodione, mancozeb, maneb, myclobutanil, PCNB, polyoxin D, propiconazole, pyraclostrobin, thiophanate-methyl, thiram, trifloxystrobin and triticonazole will reduce brown patch spreading. Damage from brown patch will slow spring green-up, and affected areas will remain unsightly until warmer spring weather conditions allow for turfgrass recovery.

Warm-season turfgrasses may show signs of green-up in southern Louisiana in late February. Do not push turfgrass growth with fertilizer. Fertilizer applied too early will feed the winter weeds, and fertilizer applied too heavily will result in lush growth that is more susceptible to injury from late frosts or brown patch. Let the grass green up gradually, and do not fertilize until after the first mowing. Remember, irrigate only as needed.

*Tom Koske*

## Miscellaneous

### Transplant Production

Seed of cole crops such as cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower will germinate satisfactorily in cool soils (temperatures from 45 to 50 degrees). They germinate more quickly at higher soil temperatures. After germination, grow plants at 70 degrees to 80 degrees about 2 months for best results. Tomatoes, peppers and eggplant seeds germinate best at soil temperatures of 65 degrees to 75 degrees. Grow transplants at 65 degrees to 75 degrees during the day and 60 degrees to 65 degrees at night for 8 to 10 weeks. Temperatures much lower than this will slow, and possibly stunt, peppers and eggplants.

A common problem is not having enough light to develop a stocky transplant, especially in a window or inside a house. Provide full sunlight all day when seedlings first appear. If light is low, keep plants cooler and drier.

*Drs. Tom Koske and Jimmy Boudreaux*

## Fruits and Nuts

### Pecan Trees

#### Selecting Pecan Trees

Pecan trees should be selected for shade tree value in the landscape with nut production being a potential bonus. Large pecan trees can not be economically managed for nut production in the landscape. Diseases, insects and squirrels can often eliminate the pecan crop.

Pecan scab disease is the main limiting factor to pecan production in Louisiana. Choosing pecan varieties with good scab resistance will help control the disease; however, wet summers can still cause the crop to be destroyed. Resistance to scab disease can change and the disease resistance may disappear with time.

Providing full sun and air circulation for pecan trees will help reduce humidity and disease severity. Keeping the lower limbs pruned 6 to 8 feet above the ground also will help provide good air circulation around trees.

Elliott variety currently has the best scab disease resistance. Sumner, Candy, Caddo and Melrose are varieties that formerly had good scab resistance that can get severe scab disease in some locations especially during wet summers. Melrose should be planted only in North Louisiana. The Jackson variety has shown some potential as a yard tree although it is moderately resistant to scab disease. Highly scab susceptible varieties such as Desirable, Schley, Wichita, Cherokee and Comanche should be avoided.

Native pecans also can be used in yard plantings since many of the native pecan trees have good scab resistance. The main disadvantages of native trees are that the nuts are often small, trees frequently take longer coming into production and the characteristics of the tree are not known until the tree has been growing a number of years.

#### Planting Pecan Trees

Bare-rooted pecan trees should be planted by late February. The dormant season ends in early March, and the bare root trees must be set out before growth begins. Container-grown trees should be planted before hot, dry conditions prevail.



Proper planting is important for a strong, vigorously growing pecan tree. Purchase sturdy, vigorous trees from a reliable nursery. A moderate-size tree will suffer less transplant shock and usually will become established and grow faster than a large tree. The ideal bare-rooted pecan tree is 4 to 5 feet.

Keep the root system moist at all times. Dampen the packing medium when the trees arrive. Plant immediately or place in cold storage. If trees must be held several days, heel them in moist soil.

Cut off all broken or bruised roots. Most new roots develop on side roots and not more than 10 inches from the taproot.

Remove 1/4 to 1/2 of the top portion of the tree to compensate for loss of a major part of the functioning root system when the tree was dug.

Dig a hole just wide and deep enough to accommodate the root system of the tree without bending any of the roots. Heavy textured and infertile soils may not be suitable for pecans.

Set the tree at the same depth it stood in the nursery row. Arrange roots in their natural position. Fill the hole about 3/4 full of good topsoil. Make sure the topsoil is about the same consistency and quality as the soil removed from the hole. Work the soil around the roots. Pour water into the hole to settle the soil and eliminate air pockets.

Finish filling the hole, and leave a slight depression at the base of the tree. This basin will facilitate watering the young tree during summer drought.

Keep optimum soil moisture levels around roots throughout the summer. The functioning root system is limited at this time. Any drought stress will greatly reduce the growth of the tree and retards its development.

### Fertilizing Pecans

Pecan trees should receive 3 lbs. of a complete fertilizer (8-8-8) or an equivalent amount of another complete fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter measured at 1 foot above the soil line in late February or early March.

*John Pyzner*

## Asian Pears

### Origin and History

Asian pears originated in China and Japan and have been grown in these countries and certain other Asian nations for at least 3,000 years. Asian pears differ genetically from European and the southern hard pears. European pears are grown to a very limited degree in the South because of high susceptibility to fire blight, a bacterial disease. The vast majority of European pear varieties, such as Bartlett, are not recommended for commercial or home use because of fire blight. Hard pears, also called sand pears, are grown quite extensively across the South and are much more tolerant of fire blight problems. Most varieties of hard pears such as Orient, Kieffer and Garber, are generally considered crosses of European and a Japanese pear. Flesh of these selections varies from extremely hard to very firm, with varying levels of grittiness. They are mainly used as processing fruits, although with proper storage some may be consumed fresh.

### Types and Varieties

Asian pears may be divided into the Japanese varieties, which have round fruits and somewhat similar to an apple in size and shape, and Chinese varieties, which produce fruit more pear-shaped (pyriform) like European varieties. Most of the varieties showing promise in the South are of Japanese origin. Japanese varieties may be further divided on the basis of their fruit skin texture, which is smooth or russeted. Smooth-skinned varieties range in skin color from green to greenish yellow, while russet skin-type varieties range from brownish-green to brown or copper. Another difference between Asian and European pears is that fruit of European selections are harvested and ripened off the tree in storage, while Asian pears are allowed to ripen on the tree before harvesting. A ripe European pear has soft, melting texture and creamy flesh while Asian pear fruits are very firm, crisp, juicy and very sweet (low-acid). Recommended Asian pear varieties include Housi, Shinko (fire blight tolerant), Korean Giant (fire blight tolerant), Shin Li (fire blight tolerant) and Seuri (fire blight tolerant).

### Rootstocks

Because of imparting greater fire blight resistance to varieties budded onto it, plus other desirable characteristics, *Pyrus calleryana* is the preferred rootstock for Asian pears grown in the Southeast. This is the same rootstock used for hard pears and European selections grown in the Southeast.

*Dr. David Himelrick*



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**John Pyzner, Ph.D., Nuts**

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

**Tom Koske, Horticulture Specialist**

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