



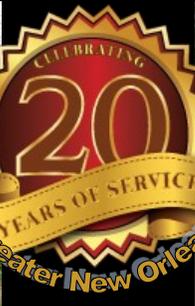
**December 2018**



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# Louisiana Master Gardeners

## Celebrating 20 Years of Service in Greater New Orleans

Historically, the Master Gardener program was conceptualized by extension agents in Washington state as a means to field horticultural questions from the ever inquisitive public. Educational methods of mass communication were not able to provide the personalized attention home gardeners needed to treat the myriad of botanical issues they faced daily. The agents dreamed of a network of trained volunteers that could better serve the community while also building their own personal knowledge bases. Little did they know in 1978, that the trial run would sweep across the nation!

This program made its way to Louisiana in 1994 starting in Baton Rouge, and is now well known as the Louisiana Master Gardeners Program. As it surpassed expectations in the state capitol, chapters were established in the other major metropolitan areas of Louisiana including Orleans and Jefferson parishes in 1998. Local favorite, Dan Gill taught the first class in New Orleans that year and the program has only grown exponentially into the new millennium. By celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the local program, this issue of GNO Gardening aims to reflect on the achievements made, opportunities created, and overall legacy of the Louisiana Master Gardeners in New Orleans region.

The Master Gardeners themselves come from a diverse assortment of interests and backgrounds.

Most are professionals from a wide range of careers including teachers, accountants, therapists and a vegetable soup of B.A.'s, M.Ed.'s, Ph.D.'s, M.D.'s and so on. All of them are motivated and giving seekers of knowledge. Many of them were already volunteering

or working at community projects and sought out the program to gain knowledge that they could use to better serve their clientele.

Nationally, the program has garnered approximately 83,000 volunteers. In the New Orleans area alone, there are 208 active Master Gardeners. According to LSU AgCenter extension agent Anna Timmerman, these volunteers logged over 8,000 hours of service in 2017. Economically this service is valued at \$23.00 per hour, making the Master Gardeners' contribution worth \$186,300 in that year alone. This does not even account for the unlogged hours that they did not even bother to enter into the system

nor those hours undoubtedly spent having their brains picked by friends, families, and neighbors seeking answers to horticulture problems! Overall, The impact made by this network is best explained by those who do this professionally - our valued extension agents Anna, Chris, and Dr. Joe.

“My Mother always said that ‘Many hands make light work.’ The Master Gardeners are our hands in the community. The outreach that they provide tremendously (Continued)



# December Vegetable Planting Guide

Crop	Recommended Variety	Planting Depth	Spacing Inches	Days Until Harvest * from transplant date
Beets	Detroit Dark Red, Kestrel, Red Ace F1, Ruby Queen	¼ inch	2-4	55-60
Brussels Sprouts	Jade Cross E, Long Island Improved	⅝ inch	12-15	90*
Cabbage	Blue Vantage, Platinum Dynasty, Stonehead, Cheers, Blue Dynasty, Emblem, Rio Verde	⅝ inch	12-15	65-75*
Carrots	Danvers 128, Purple Haze, Thumbelina, Apache, Enterprise, Maverick, Sugar Snax 54	⅝ inch	1-2	70-75
Celery	None Given	⅝ inch	6-8	210
Chinese Cabbage	None Given	¼ inch	12	60-80*
Collards	Champions, Flash, Georgia Southern, Top Bunch, Vates	⅝ inch	6-12	75
Garlic	Creole: Early, Louisiana, White Mexican; Italian: Early Red, Lorz; Large: Elephant (Tahitian)	1 inch	4-6	210
Kale	None Given	½ inch	12-18	50
Kohlrabi	Early Purple Vienna, Early White, Vienna, Winner	⅝ inch	6	55-75
Leeks	Alora	⅝ inch	2-4	135-210
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; White: Candy, Savannah Sweet; Vidalia: Candy Ann, Caramelo, Century, Georgia Boy, Mata Hari	½ inch	4-6	85
Radishes	Cherriette, Champion, White Icicle, April Cross	⅝ inch	1	22-28
Shallots	Matador, Prism	1 inch	4-8	50
Spinach	Bloomsdale Long Standing, Melody, Tye, Unipak 151	⅝ inch	3-6	35-45
Swiss Chard	None Given	¼ inch	6-8	45-55
Turnips	Alamo, All Top, Purple, Top White Globe, Seven Top, Southern Green, Top Star, Tokyo Cross	⅝ inch	2-6	40-50

# Louisiana Master Gardeners

## Celebrating 20 Years of Service in Greater New Orleans

increases our impact... Things that would not happen include: The Spring and Fall Garden Shows, 80% of speaking engagements, school gardens, community and demonstration gardens, and more.”-

*Chris Dunaway*

“I’ve personally benefited over the years from knowing several Louisiana Master Gardeners before working in extension. I was new to the area when I first began working as a landscaper and found that my Master Gardener friends became invaluable mentors as I struggled to learn an entirely new set of plants and growing conditions... The accumulated knowledge that they have is an amazing resource that members of the public can tap into, really ‘extending extension’ into the community in tangible ways.” - *Anna Timmerman*

“...I have come to appreciate, respect and value the dedication, energy and expertise of Master Gardeners... All over the area you can find the hard work of Master Gardeners on display in public gardens, French Quarter public settings, butterfly gardens, native plant gardens, school gardens, and community gardens giving the people of our area inspiration, education, relaxation and motivation...Master Gardeners...are an integral part of the LSU AgCenter extension, research and education programs.” -

*Dr. Joe Willis*

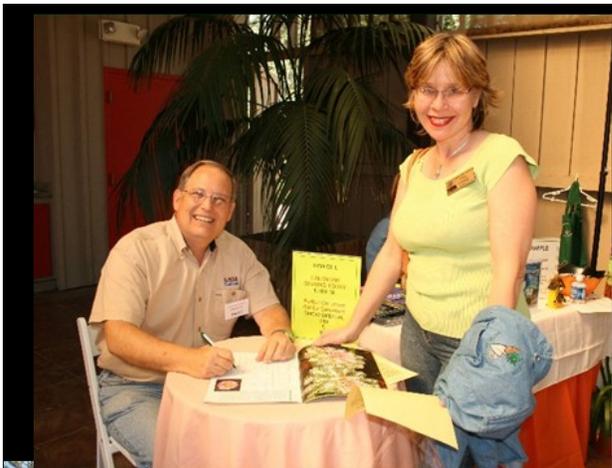
Much of the impact of the program in this area has been facilitated by the non profit organization Master Gardeners of Greater New Orleans. MGGNO was created in 2006 by MGs in the area who had already been gathering at informal meetings to discuss projects and current garden issues. Since then the organization has become the hub for most of the local Master Gardener activities. By concentrating the efforts of volunteers from Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, and St. Bernard parishes the organization acts as a catalyst for the now 201 member strong association. The projects that they work on are as diverse as the volunteers themselves including school teaching programs, demonstration gardens, public education and community events. The beauty of their work is a result of the active role they take in their communities as mentors, binding so many through a love of the natural environment and a desire to protect and enrich our lives with horticultural education.

Finally, back in 1978 at Washington state the idea of this program was initially rejected by research specialists at the Western Washington Research and Extension Center (WWREC) in Puyallup. As many great ideas initially are denied, it reminds us to never take these educational opportunities for granted including the greater good they achieve in the long run. Master Gardeners are those that participate for the sake of sharing with no expectations in return. Their selfless service is a testament to the power of people of Louisiana. As a graduate of the 2018 Master Gardener class, I myself am energized by the legacy of this program to continue participating and learning and to carry its wisdom into the future.

~Erin Schott, LMG



LMG Gwen Benefiel instructs local students on composting at [AgMagic on the River](#) at [Docville Farms](#) in Me-



# A Case for Leaving the Leaves

A recent social media campaign caught my eye with the #leavetheleaves being promoted by the Xerces Society. The Society promotes invertebrate conservation work through partnerships with federal and state agencies, the USDA, scientists, educators, and land stewards. Many gardeners in the New Orleans area are already planting milkweed for the monarch butterflies, providing bee hotels, bird baths, and other infrastructure to attract wildlife to their gardens. The sale of native plants is also on the rise according to local nursery retailers, showing that gardeners in our area are concerned about landscaping that also provides ecological services to local wildlife.

While we don't need to deal with as many heaps of fallen leaves as our northern neighbors, many of us do rake or blow leaves out of our yards and gardens, bagging them up for the trash or better yet, adding them to a compost pile. A tidy yard and garden is not a bad thing, but there is a case to be made for reserving at least some of the leaves shed this fall as habitat for insects and other invertebrates, as a free source of nutrients for the soil or an insulating, self-composting mulch for garden beds. The benefits of leaving the leaves are many, so read on!

We all know about the annual migration of the monarch butterflies, but where do all of the other

species in our area go? Most of our butterflies and moths, the cloudless sulfur (*Phoebis sennae*), red-banded hairstreak (*Calycopis cecrops*), luna moths (*Actias luna*) and all species of swallowtails, actually stay put. Butterflies and moths rely on leaf litter as cover for the next generation. Hairstreaks lay their

eggs on fallen oak leaves, which will be the caterpillar's first meal in the spring. Many species of caterpillars that got a late start tuck themselves away for a few months underneath an insulating blanket of leaves and other debris. Chrysalises, especially, swallowtails, are disguised as twigs in the garden and hatch in the spring. Pruning those dry sticks that chrysalises or eggs are hidden on, or raking the leaves means that you've inadvertently throwing away next year's butterflies and other insects without even realizing it.



Bumblebees, and many other ground-nesting bees use leaf litter to shelter their nests and protect the hive for next season. A female bee digs a nest a few inches into the soil, leaf litter helps to keep the cold wind out. Snails, slugs, spiders, beetles, worms, and other little critters all use leaf litter as cover. Many of these things are food for songbirds too, meaning that a thick layer of leaves someplace in the yard has the potential to also act as a giant birdfeeder this winter.

*(Continued)*



Juniper Hairstreak (*Callophrys gryneus*)



White-M Hairstreak (*Parrhasius m album*)



Gray Hairstreak (*Strymon melinus*)



Oak Hairstreak (*Satyrium favonius*)

# A Case for Leaving the Leaves

(Continued)



Plants also benefit from leaf litter. When leaves break down they create a free source of compost, rejuvenating soil and adding nutrients back into the soil. The old myth that leaves on the lawn kill grass has been disproven. Grass goes dormant around the same time that the leaves drop. Those magnolia and live oak leaves on the lawn aren't to blame for the patchiness of the turf under the tree - look up! The shade is to blame, not the leaves!

A tidy yard is absolutely still possible, and you can still harness the power of those leaves! There are ways to have the best of both worlds. Here are a few ideas:

- Rake or blow leaves into flower beds or around trees and shrubs. Use a hand rake to even them out.
- Cover them with a layer of pine straw to keep them from blowing back into the lawn. Pine straw tends to knit together and won't float or blow away. It will "lock in" the leaves and allow them to break down around your plants over the winter while providing insect habitat.
- Blow or rake leaves into a back corner or out of sight area of the yard. Behind a garden shed or a garage is a good spot. The leaves will break down into leaf mold over the winter, collect this in the spring and use it in your pots and garden beds. Consider this a form of composting without the pile or flipping. The layer of leaves covering even a corner of the yard provides lots of wildlife benefits.
- Shredded leaves take up one-quarter of the volume, break down faster and are less likely to blow away. Collect them with a bagging mower or gather them into a metal trash bin and use a weed eater to carefully shred them like you are using a huge blender. Add those shredded leaves to your compost or use them as a now less prone-to-blow-away mulch.
- Use a mulching mower to shred the leaves without removing them from the lawn. These leaf bits break down quickly and fertilize everything. The shredded bits pretty much disappear into the grass and help to protect it from the cold.



Take this opportunity to get all your pine straw mulch for free. The stuff is just lying around.



Fresh mulch can really clean up the look of a garden. Here I used cypress tree leaves.

- Tender tropical plants in our landscape can really benefit from leaves insulating their roots. Ginger, firespike plant, cannas, clerodendrums, bird-of-paradise, and bougainvillea would all appreciate the extra protection for the winter.

Rake or blow leaves into vegetable

(Continued)

# A Case for Leaving the Leaves

(Continued)

- gardens or raised beds. Leaves make great mulch for vegetables, and if your garden is tillable, till them under, which shreds them up and incorporates them into the soil. You can also leave them on the surface of the vegetable garden all winter and turn them under in the spring before planting summer crops.
- If you can't stand the sight of leaves in your garden, tuck them away behind shrubs and hedges where you won't see them. Out of sight, out of mind. Still beneficial! Note: Don't pile them against your house; that would create a bridge for termites.

If you are the type of gardener who loves to encourage the pollinators, birds, and other wildlife in the landscape (you avoid pesticides, plant milkweed, put out bird feeders, etc.) leave the leaves this year. It makes zero sense to throw leaves in the landfill when they can benefit our yards and gardens in many ways. By using the strategies outlined above, it is possible to have a neat, attractive yard while still providing habitat and food for wildlife and nutrients for plants. Next year, while enjoying your garden and watching a native bee pollinating away or a butterfly flying past, remember that they made it through the winter due in part to having someplace warm to hide.

~Anna Timmerman

## In the Kitchen with Austin

### Shrimp and Grits Dressing

This is the perfect addition to any holiday table. And...it's versatile enough to serve for brunch.

#### Ingredients:

- |                         |                               |  |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| ◆ 3 cups chicken broth  | ◆ ½ cup butter                | ◆ ½ cup Parmesan cheese                        |
| ◆ ½ tsp. salt           | ◆ 3 lg. eggs, lightly beaten  | ◆ 1 lb. medium-sized shrimp, peeled & deveined |
| ◆ ¼ tsp. cayenne pepper | ◆ 1 red bell pepper, diced    |  |
| ◆ 1 cup uncooked grits  | ◆ 1 cup breadcrumbs           |  |
|                         | ◆ 1 cup green onions, chopped |  |

#### Directions:

Preheat oven to 325°. Bring broth and next two ingredients to a boil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Whisk in grits, and return to a boil. Reduce heat to low, and stir in butter. Cover and simmer, stirring occasionally for 10 minutes or until liquid is absorbed. Remove from heat.



Stir together eggs and next four ingredients in a large bowl. Gradually stir about ¼ of the hot grits mixture into the egg mixture. Add egg mixture to the remaining hot grits mixture, stirring constantly. Stir in shrimp. Pour mixture into a lightly greased 11x7-inch baking dish.

Bake for 1 hour, or until dressing is set. Let stand 10 minutes before serving.



*Bon Manger!*

# Build Your Own Rooting Chamber

Starting your own plants from those you admire in your friend or neighbor's yard is one of the little pleasures of being a gardener. It adds to the allure of the landscape when plants have a provenance – “my grandma used to have a vase of these on her table all summer long, now I can too” or “this tree comes from the same one I sat under with my dad when he told me about the birds and the bees.” But sometimes you just like what you see and would like to have one growing in your yard too. That desire ultimately leads you to one question that must be answered, “How do I propagate this plant?”

Before you grow it, however, there is one question you must answer first, “What is this plant?” Once you know that, you are ready to answer the second question. The best way to answer the second question is not through trial and error but by relying on the trial and error of previous plantsmen. Search the internet for “how to propagate such and such” or check a copy of publications like [Plant Propagation A to Z](#) by Geoff Bryant or [The Reference Manual of Woody Plant Propagation](#) by Michael A. Dirr and Charles W. Heuser, Jr. These reference books will tell you what propagation method has proven most successful for the particular plant you are interested in. Each contain encyclopedic alphabetical lists of plants and how to propagate them. They also discuss tools and materials needed, basic techniques of propagation, how to choose the best plant material for propagating and expected results.



You don't need a big greenhouse to propagate new plants.



Photo of typical plastic storage container used to make a plant propagation chamber.

One of the methods that is commonly used is rooted cuttings. In most cases, it is recommended that the cuttings be kept in a high humidity, low light, moderate temperature environment until they are rooted. The following is an inexpensive, adaptable, small rooting chamber that anyone can make. I have used this type chamber for more than 20 years with a high degree of success.

It starts with one of the cheaper clear storage containers that you can get at any number of big box and discount stores. I emphasize “cheaper” because these are also less likely to be airtight. You do want passive air exchange in your chamber. You also don't want the container to be very large as you want to be able to move it around if needed. My go-to is around 12”x12”x12” (Figure 1)

and costs about \$4.00. You want the chamber to be tall so it can accommodate various sizes of cuttings without concern about them being squashed by the lid. Drill  $\frac{1}{4}$ ” to  $\frac{1}{2}$ ” holes in the bottom of the container for drainage. My container has six equally spaced holes (Figure 2). You want the cuttings in high humidity but not in saturated rooting medium. Note: remember these drainage holes when place your chamber and protect anything you set it on.



Be sure to drill drainage holes so the container does not hold too much water.

(Continued)

# Build Your Own Rooting Chamber

(Continued)

Next comes the rooting medium. There are many types of media that can be used from potting soil to builder's sand. I prefer a mixture of 1 part horticultural perlite to 1 part milled sphagnum peat moss. The perlite (Figure 3) is sterile, chemically inert, has no cation exchange capacity and keeps the medium well-aerated. Sphagnum peat (Figure 4) is relatively sterile, has certain fungicidal properties and absorbs 10 to 20 times its weight in water. You can add sharp sand or fine compost as well.

You want to get your medium fully wetted by mixing with water in a container or by watering it well once you have put it into your chamber (remember the drainage holes). Put a 4" layer of the medium into the bottom of your chamber. That gives you plenty of depth for various types of cuttings and it won't dry out. You're now ready to take your cuttings, treat and stick them.

Put the top on the container and place it where it gets ample but not excessive light (no direct sunlight) and stays around 70-75°F. Then just check periodically to see when the cuttings are rooted. You can use one chamber and root a variety of plants in it, removing each as it roots. You can also make several chambers and use each one for a particular type of plant.

~Dr. Joe Willis



Use a soilless mix of perlite and sphagnum peat moss to propagate new plants. The moss retains moisture while the perlite keeps it light and improves drainage.



Before long you can be growing your own plants from cuttings. Tip: Take cuttings of my plants in the fall, grow them in a chamber over the winter to have new plants for my yard in the spring.

Herbaceous or nonwoody plants such as begonias, impatiens, coleus, many hardy perennials and many house plants root easily and quickly from stem cuttings taken anytime they are in active growth. Cuttings from many of these plants will even root in water. The use of rooting hormones on these fast-rooting cuttings is optional.

Some deciduous woody plants are propagated readily from hardwood cuttings taken in late winter or early spring, around February in New Orleans. These dormant leafless cutting can be cut longer, 12 to 18 inches, and usually are easy to root. Figs, wisteria, honeysuckle, flowering quince and hydrangeas may be propagated this way.

Be prepared for some failures when rooting cuttings, but do consider giving it a try. The satisfaction of propagating your own plants is hard to beat. ~Dan Gill

The preceding is from the article [A cutting-edge way to grow new plants](https://www.nola.com/homegarden/index.ssf/2012/08/a_cutting-edge_way_to_grow_new.html) by Dan Gill. Click on the link to see the full article: [https://www.nola.com/homegarden/index.ssf/2012/08/a\\_cutting-edge\\_way\\_to\\_grow\\_new.html](https://www.nola.com/homegarden/index.ssf/2012/08/a_cutting-edge_way_to_grow_new.html)

# Indicator Weeds in Turfgrass

Weeds are unsightly, disrupting the uniformity and appearance of fine turfgrass. It is no wonder that weeds are considered the number one problem in Southern lawns. At the soil level, weeds are in direct competition with lawns for essential nutrients, water and light. Plants that are weeds in lawns are usually very aggressive and able to compete with turfgrass because they can adapt to a wide variety of environmental conditions. What you may not realize is that the presence of certain “indicator” weeds may provide clues about soil problems or incorrect cultural practices that are favoring weeds over the lawn grass.

## Excessive Shade Indicator

Basketgrass (*Oplismenus hirtellus*) is a perennial grass that’s common throughout shady areas of the lawn. If you see a lot of basketgrass, you have a shade problem, and it’s too shady to grow a St. Augustine grass or any other lawn grass in this area. Basketgrass is more tolerant and more competitive in shade than St. Augustine grass. In full sun or moderate shade, St. Augustine grass has the competitive advantage. As the shade increases, the competitive advantage swings toward basketgrass. There is no selective control option to remove basketgrass in St. Augustine grass. It’s time to prune out some limbs or cut down some trees if your intentions are to grow turfgrass in basketgrass-infested areas.



Basketgrass (*Oplismenus hirtellus*)

## Low Nitrogen Level Indicator

White clover (*Trifolium repens*), lespedeza (*Lespedeza* spp.) and other legume species indicate low fertility, particularly inadequate levels of nitrogen. Fertilize the lawn appropriately and there should be fewer legumes infesting the yard in the future. Proper and timely fertilizing may not eliminate legumes but should create a soil environment that favors the lawn over the weed.



White clover (*Trifolium repens*)

## Compaction Indicators

Annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*), goosegrass (*Eleusine indica*) and dallisgrass (*Paspalum dilatatum*) infesting turf may indicate soil compaction.

These weeds thrive in compacted soil and are often seen in areas where there is heavy foot traffic or where vehicles park in the turf. Aerification is necessary to loosen these severely compacted areas. Eliminating compacted soils will improve soil aeration, water percolation, turf response to fertilizers and stimulate turf root growth. In fact, I’ve never seen a situation when aerification failed to improve turfgrass health and reduce the presence of compaction-loving weeds.

*(Continued)*



Annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*)



Goosegrass (*Eleusine indica*)



Dallisgrass (*Paspalum dilatatum*)

# Coming Events

Date	Event	Cost	Link
Saturday December 8 <sup>th</sup> 10:00 AM-5:00 PM	New Orleans Permaculture Action Day @ Grow On (2358 Urquhart St., New Orleans, LA)	Free	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/events/976827929180331/">https://www.facebook.com/events/976827929180331/</a>  www.growonurbanfarms.com  *Master Gardener Continuing Ed Credit!
Saturday December 8 <sup>th</sup> 1:30-3:00 PM	DIY Urban Water Management @ All You Need (3700 Toledano St., New Orleans, LA)	\$20	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/events/487095228475686/">https://www.facebook.com/events/487095228475686/</a>  *Master Gardener Continuing Ed Credit!
Sunday December 16 <sup>th</sup> 10:00 AM-5:00 PM	Naturalist Workshop: Reading the Winter Landscape (Lumberton, MS) Hosted by All You Need	\$45	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/events/254235812104707/">https://www.facebook.com/events/254235812104707/</a>  *Master Gardener Continuing Ed Credit!
Saturday January 12 <sup>th</sup> 10:30 AM-NOON	Passion for Camellias @ New Orleans Botanical Gardens	\$15	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/events/400880723784608/">https://www.facebook.com/events/400880723784608/</a>  * Master Gardener Continuing Ed Credit!
Saturday January 19 <sup>th</sup> 9:00 AM- NOON	Arbor Day @ LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens (4560 Essen Lane, Baton Rouge)	Free	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/events/1484770251649219/">https://www.facebook.com/events/1484770251649219/</a>  * Master Gardener Continuing Ed Credit!
Saturday January 19 <sup>th</sup> 10:30 AM-NOON	Artful Training of Niwa-ki, Tradi- tional Methods of Japanese Tree Sculpting @ New Orleans Botanical Gardens	\$15	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/events/371703070239501/">https://www.facebook.com/events/371703070239501/</a>  *Master Gardener Continuing Ed Credit!

## December Checklist/Garden Tips

Move tender container plants indoors on nights when temperatures are predicted to be in the low thirties or lower to prevent damage. Leave them inside in sunny windows or place them back outside when the freeze is over.

Although cold, dry winds can dry out leaf tissues and cause brown edges, plants do not feel wind-chill. When you see low temperatures predicted, focus on the actual temperature rather than wind-chill. If it's getting down to 38 degrees with a wind-chill of 25 degrees, you do not have to worry about a freeze.

Plan now for freezing temperatures. Decide what tender plants you will choose to protect and what will be left to its own chances. Make sure you have enough materials on hand to protect those plants that you will cover. Suitable materials include plastic, fabric sheets, blankets, tarps and cardboard boxes to name a few. Each plant to be protected needs to have a covering large enough to extend to the ground. It also helps to have stakes available to drive into the ground around plants to help support the coverings over the plants and bricks to weight down the bottom edges of the covering.

Cool season herbs like cilantro, dill, fennel, parsley, borage, sorrel, and chervil can be directly seeded into garden beds. Soak your parsley seed for a few hours in warm water to help them germinate better.

# Indicator Weeds in Turfgrass

(Continued)

## Drainage Problem Indicators

We've had so much rain in Louisiana over the past two summers that plants that love wet soils have taken over constantly saturated turf areas. Poorly drained areas are prone to infestations of green kyllinga (*Kyllinga brevifolia*), yellow nutsedge (*Cyperus esculentus*), dollarweed (*Hydrocotyle* spp) and doveweed (*Murdannia nudiflora*). Correcting drainage can be as simple as filling in low spots with top soil or as complicated as installing subsurface drainage or regrading and sloping poorly drained areas. Improving soil drainage is an especially difficult and expensive task with heavy clay soils, but these weeds will persist until drainage problems are corrected.



Green kyllinga (*Kyllinga brevifolia*)



Yellow nutsedge (*Cyperus esculentus*)



Dollarweed (*Hydrocotyle* spp)



Doveweed (*Murdannia nudiflora*).

## Low Soil Fertility Indicator

Although carpetgrass (*Axonopus affinis*) can adapt to most soil types, the weed prefers acidic soils, and the presence of this weed may indicate low pH and overall low fertility. Having acidic soil is not a bad thing in itself. Generally, most Southern lawn grasses prefer slightly acidic (pH range between 6 and 7) soil. However, very acidic soil, such as those below pH 5.5, may reduce the competitiveness of lawn grasses like St. Augustine grass and bermudagrass, resulting in reduced vigor and subsequent weed invasion. Soil testing is the key to proper pH management and fertilization. Recommendations provided by soil test labs provide guidelines for fertilization and liming to establish and maintain turfgrasses. Soils that have very low pH values should be limed as recommended by the soil test report.



Carpetgrass (*Axonopus affinis*)

Rarely do you see high levels of weed pressure in thick, healthy turf that's managed properly. Severe weed problems are usually the result of having a thin lawn caused by some improper soil condition or poor cultural practices that provide a poor growing environment for the lawn and the perfect environment for weed growth. Take a good look at the weeds growing in your clients' lawn because they can be extremely helpful in diagnosing underlying soil or management problems that are favoring weed growth and restricting lawn growth. Correcting these problems may help eliminate conditions that enable the weed's persistence.

~Dr. Ron Strahan

# December Checklist/Garden Tips

Did you know that Louisiana is home to several local Christmas tree nurseries? Why not get out there and cut your own? Some tree farms offer a real winter experience complete with wagon rides, petting zoos, and other attractions. Why not take the family out to the country for an outing? To locate Christmas tree farms in our area, the Louisiana Department of Ag and Forestry has them listed by parish here: <http://www.ldaf.state.la.us/news/louisiana-choose-and-cut-christmas-tree-farms/>

Winterize your garden tools before you put them away. Clean and sharpen tools, apply a thin layer of protective oil to the blades, and coat wooden handles with sealer, tung oil or varnish to protect the wood and keep it in good shape. Drain the gas from lawn mowers and other gas powered equipment (see the owner's manual for recommendations).

Mulch your landscape with 3-4 inches of pine straw to protect tender roots ahead of freezing conditions. Pine straw insulates the soil, keeps the soil moisture consistent, and neatens everything up.

Plant cool season bedding plants now, and be sure to keep them deadheaded so that they bloom well into the spring months. Great things to plant now include snapdragons, foxgloves, dianthus, pansies, petunias, violas, columbine, delphinium, and cyclamen.

Poinsettias are a great addition to interior holiday displays, place them near a window to give them a longer "shelf-life". Wait to water them until the soil feels dry to the touch.

If you bought tulip or hyacinth bulbs last month, plant them at the end of December. If you want to have hyacinths blooming indoors, plant them halfway into a shallow bowl with pebbles or marbles in the bottom. Add just enough water so that the bottom of the bulbs stay wet, adding water when it stops making contact. Place them someplace sunny. It takes four to six weeks for them to bloom, bringing a welcome jolt of spring into the house.

If we get a hard freeze, wait a few days to evaluate the damage. Many cole crops will bounce back, as will some landscape plants. Things usually look worse the next morning after a frost than they actually are. Waiting gives the plants a chance to recover, and you can see the extent of the true damage. Prune cannas, philodendrons, clerodendrons, and ginger back to the ground that got burned. They will be back in the spring.

Many garden chemicals are water based and can be destroyed by freezing. The loss of chemicals can be expensive and spilled chemicals can create dangerous conditions. Keep chemicals in a location that doesn't freeze, and if there are children in the house, they should be stored in a locked location.

Cut back any lingering tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) to encourage lingering Monarch butterflies to migrate south. Cut the plants back to the ground if possible, they will be back in the spring just in time for the return of the butterflies.

Consider creating holiday arrangements and centerpieces using plant material from your yard and gardens. Many of our most common landscape plants make excellent seasonal greenery, including magnolias, nandina, hollies, juniper, cypress, and camellias. Cut some greenery and spend some time creating arrangements for your table or mantelpiece. This can be a fun holiday activity to share with family members. The fragrance of evergreens also adds to the seasonal ambiance!

If you have any of the holiday cacti, including Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter cacti, be sure to put it on display. Once the blooms finish, place it in a sunny window to recover and prepare for next year's flowering. Allow the soil to dry out between all waterings. Prolonged soil moisture can rot the roots. Fertilize lightly with a little water-soluble fertilizer once a month to keep it happy.

Don't forget to add nature's generous bounty of leaves provided this time of year to your compost piles, or use them to mulch shrub and flower beds. Stock pile pine straw in plastic bags to use to cover low growing plants for freeze protection.

# December Lawn Care Do's & Don't's

## Do:

1. Collect grass clippings and dispose of them if there are weeds setting seed in the lawn.
2. Apply selective herbicides and sedge killers to kill off winter weeds growing in the lawn. You may also scout the lawn and remove weeds by hand. Make a game out of it with kids and grandkids.
3. Continue to scout for fungal damage and control with fungicides if necessary. The most prevalent is called Large Patch of Warm-Season Turfgrass. [Click here to find information about large patch disease from the LSU AgCenter.](#)
4. Take a soil test.
5. Apply sulfur or lime to adjust the pH if necessary according to soil lab recommendations.
6. Use a mulching mower to shred fallen leaves without removing them or use a bagging mower to collect them and put them in your compost pile or use them as mulch in your gardens.

## Do Not:

1. Do not apply fertilizer until mid-February or March of next year.
2. Do not lay down fill over the lawn grass.
3. Do not lay sod.
4. Do not spread warm-season turfgrass seed.
5. Do not dethatch the lawn.
6. Do not aerate the lawn.
7. Do not overseed St. Augustine grass with winter ryegrass. In these lawns, ryegrass can compete with the turfgrass as spring comes on.



## 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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[For more information visit LSUAgCenter.com](http://LSUAgCenter.com)

Joe Willis  
Orleans Parish  
Horticulture Agent  
(504)483-9471

Anna Timmerman  
Jefferson Parish  
Horticulture Agent  
(504)736-6519

Chris Dunaway  
GNO Area  
Extension Associate  
(504)736-6519

To subscribe to this newsletter please send a request to [GNOGardening@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:GNOGardening@agcenter.lsu.edu)