

TRI-PARISH AG NEWS

Pointe Coupee, West Baton Rouge, & Iberville
March 2020

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March & April Events

All March & April AgCenter Events have been cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19. The Pointe Coupee Extension Office is currently closed to the public, and all agents and staff are working remotely.

If you have any questions, please contact Mark Carriere via email mcarriere@agcenter.lsu.edu or by calling (985)438-2019.

Join our Remind Text Group

Join our remind group to stay updated with any and all information that is current from the LSU AgCenter agents and research faculty.

Simply follow these directions to join:

- Pointe Coupee Ag Producers text @pcfarmers to 81010
- WBR Ag Producers text @wbrfarmers to 81010
- Iberville Ag Producers text @iberfarmer to 81010

 [Facebook.com/Pointe Coupee Parish Extension Office](https://www.facebook.com/Pointe-Coupee-Parish-Extension-Office)

Corn Planting Dates

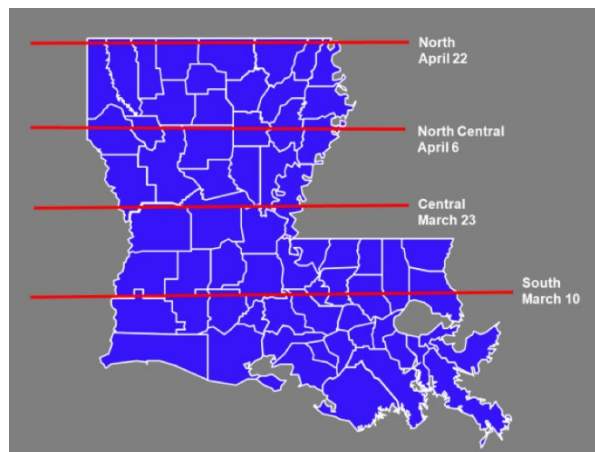
By Dan Fromme, LSU AgCenter Corn Specialist

Corn growth and development respond to temperature, not day length. This means the calendar date is not as important as soil and air temperature when considering when to plant corn. Good germination and emergence are expected when the soil temperature at a 2-inch depth is 55 degrees Fahrenheit by 9 a.m. for three consecutive days. This normally occurs in late February and March in Louisiana. In most years, the optimal planting window for the southern half of Louisiana ranges from Feb. 25 to March 23, and for the northern half of Louisiana, the optimal planting window ranges from March 24 to April 22.

Extending planting past the last optimal planting date can result in losses of .5 to 1% per day. The last optimal planting date for different parts of the state are shown in **Figure 1**. Yield reduction associated with late-planted corn gradually declines and escalates over an extended time period. Therefore, there is little justification to stop or abandon corn planting if planting is slightly delayed past the last optimal dates.

Frost may occur after these planting dates in some years; however, corn typically withstands frost with little economic injury. Corn younger than V6 (six-leaf stage) usually can withstand a light frost if the temperature does not drop below 28 to 30 degrees. A moderate freeze will burn any existing leaves and cause them to drop, but new leaves can emerge in four to five days with warm temperatures. However, as the growing point moves upward near the soil surface, the possibility of injury increases.

Figure 1. Last optimal planting date for different parts of the state. Extending planting past the last optimal planting date can result in losses of .5 to 1% per day.



Cotton Varieties for 2020

By Dan Fromme, LSU AgCenter Cotton Specialist

A summary of all the cotton variety trials and on-farm demonstrations that were conducted in 2019 are available here:

[2020 Cotton Varieties for Louisiana: Variety Trials and On-Farm Demonstrations](#)



Should you apply an in-furrow starter fertilizer to corn?

By LSU AgCenter weed scientist Josh Copes, soil scientists Rasel Parvej and Syam Dodla, and corn specialist Dan Fromme

Phone calls have been coming in regarding applying an in-furrow starter fertilizer at corn planting. An in-furrow starter is commonly called a “pop-up” fertilizer that is applied in the seed furrow (in-furrow). This allows for ease of application and placing the nutrients close to the germinating seed, which allows the seedling to easily access nutrients. A good in-furrow fertilizer will contain a high percentage of phosphorus along with some nitrogen, but could also contain sulfur, potassium and micronutrients. In Louisiana, ammonium polyphosphate fertilizers such as 10-34-0 and 11-37-0 are commonly used in-furrow. When applied in-furrow, there is potential for salt and ammonia injury from fertilizers with high salt indexes or contain urea or ammonium-nitrogen. Therefore, urea is not recommended to be applied in-furrow. Adequate soil moisture at planting, however, decreases the likelihood of potential salt injury. Another starter fertilizer placement strategy is applying in a 2 by 2 band (2 inches to the side of the seed furrow and 2 inches below the seed depth). This method of application requires additional planter attachments and allows for use of higher rates of fertilizer at planting by avoiding salt and ammonia injury. In-furrow application rates in excess of 5 gallons per acre of ammonium polyphosphate in corn are not advised. If you would like to know more about salt index for fertilizers, visit http://www.spectrumanalytic.com/support/library/ff/salt_index_calculation.htm.

In Louisiana, considerable research has been conducted on the use of starter fertilizers in corn, either with 10-34-0 or 11-37-0 (Mascagni et al, 2006). In five out of 15 trials conducted from 1991 to 2005, corn yields were significantly increased when in-furrow starter fertilizer was applied. It should be noted that in each year, soil test-based phosphorus levels were considered high in the test area. Therefore, corn yield increase could still occur even though soil test phosphorus levels are high. Phosphorus deficiency symptoms and yield responses to the in-furrow fertilizer were most common in light textured soils (sandy loam and silt loam soils). Mascagni et al also documented that nitrogen-only fertilizers had little effect on early-season plant growth while in-furrow fertilizers containing phosphorus increased early-season plant growth in all trials. This demonstrates that it is the phosphorus component that improved early-season plant growth. The enhanced plant growth from the phosphorus-containing fertilizers also resulted in hastened maturity of the corn crop. Mid-silk occurred four days earlier where yield responses were observed and three days earlier when no yield response occurred.

With low commodity prices and high input costs, producers question if they should spend the money on applying an in-furrow starter. Situations where a positive yield response will likely occur from the use of in-furrow phosphorus containing fertilizers are:

- Planting earlier than recommended.
- Planting in high residue/no-till situations.
- When there is a need to apply phosphorus, fertilizer based on soil test results.
- Years with poor early season growing conditions (low temperature and excessive rainfall). Soils, especially sandy and silt loam soils, are slow to warm in the spring. Cool soils can often result in reduced phosphorus uptake by the plant resulting in temporary phosphorus deficiency, even though soil test phosphorus levels are adequate.

Therefore, when planting earlier than Feb. 25 in south and central Louisiana and March 10 in north Louisiana, an in-furrow starter may be beneficial. High residue situations typically result in cooler and wetter soils that can result in poor early growth and phosphorus deficiencies. Also, early-season nitrogen deficiencies may occur in high residue/no-till situations. When soil tests recommend the addition of phosphorus, using an in-furrow starter would be recommended. As mentioned earlier, an in-furrow application of the fertilizer allows easy access of the nutrients since it is applied in a concentrated band with the seed. Unfortunately, we cannot predict early-season growing conditions, an in-furrow starter can be cheap insurance against detrimental cool and wet weather conditions often experienced in Louisiana in March.

In summary, if you are equipped to apply a fertilizer in-furrow and plan on planting as early as possible or into high residue/no-till situations then applying an in-furrow starter may be beneficial. If soil test reports call for the addition of phosphorus, then an in-furrow starter would be a good method to place the phosphorus near the developing roots. Also, nutrient use efficiency may be greater compared to a broadcast application of phosphorus, especially if the broadcast application occurred in the fall. This is due in part to time, since an in-furrow application is applied at planting, there is less time for soil reactions to tie up phosphorus from being available for plant uptake. Soil pH should also be considered for the decision of when to apply phosphorus. Phosphorus is most plant-available between 6.5 and 7.5 pH. If soil pH is outside this range, then phosphorus should be applied closer to planting.

Seed Relabeling in Corn

By Dan Fromme, LSU AgCenter Corn Specialist

Before you plant, check the tag on that bag of corn seed. Often in the seed industry, the same variety is sold under multiple brand names. In other words, just because the seed is in a different bag does not mean it is not the same variety.

This creates two significant problems for farmers:

- **Overpaying for seed:** Because different brands often sell the same variety for very different prices, some farmers significantly overpay, perhaps not realizing that other brands sell the same variety at a lower price.
- **Lack of genetic diversity:** When the same variety is sold under multiple brand names, it is easy for farmers to unknowingly purchase the same variety from multiple brands, thinking they are buying a unique variety from each brand. This can lead to a failure to establish the genetic diversity that many farmers strive for when selecting their seed.

Federal and state seed labeling regulations typically require bags of seed to be labeled with the variety name. Each variety has a unique set of numbers and/or letters, which are typically in a sequence of six to 10 digits.

Look closely at the tag at left. The variety name is 1065462. On the tag at right, the variety name is 101542-05. That means these two corn varieties are not the same. If the numbers were the same, you would have been planting the same variety.



Proper Crape Myrtle Pruning

By Mark Carriere, Associate County Agent

Pruning trees, especially crape myrtles, is commonplace in the winter months. This is when the trees are dormant, and pruning can be executed with the least amount of damage. Unfortunately, crape myrtles are among the most abused trees in Louisiana’s residential and commercial landscapes.

Figure 1. Crape myrtles that are improperly pruned can lead to huge galls that invite disease and insect pressure that can stress the tree and ultimately lead to death of the tree.



Crape myrtles only need occasional pruning, in most cases, to obtain the desired landscape effect. But many times, these plants are “butchered” for no good reason.

An unfortunate, but common, trend in crape myrtle pruning is to “lop off the tops”, which results in a crew-cut appearance. The lush growth that occurs at these cut sites in spring appears vigorous, but it’s structurally very weak and is more susceptible to fungus diseases such as powdery mildew. Worse yet, when pruning is done improperly over several seasons, large, swollen unsightly knobs form at the point where pruning is done each year.

Sometimes this pruning method for crape myrtles is referred to as “crape murder”. Although this practice does not kill a crape myrtle it does affect the overall health of the tree.

The method of cutting back the main branches of a tree to the same spot every year is called pollarding. This pruning method is used on some types of trees in certain situations and tends to be more common in Europe than America.

Figure 2. These crape myrtles have been pruned improperly for several years and have recently been done so causing very weak or fragile points to overall structure of the tree.



A gardener should understand, however, that the life of a crape myrtle is shortened – and the natural beauty of the tree is destroyed – by this pruning technique. We often encounter gardeners who think they are supposed to prune their crape myrtles this way. Nothing could be further from the truth. For most of us, simply enhancing the natural shape of our crape myrtles is appropriate.

Some gardeners have been told that crape myrtles need to be pruned that way to bloom well. This is also inaccurate. The flower clusters may be larger on pollarded trees. But the added weight on the ends of long, thin branches causes them to bend over awkwardly, especially after rain. And because the tree is smaller, it actually produces fewer flower clusters.

Figure 3. This crape myrtle has been properly pruned and trained to have a shapelier appearance. This tree is also more structurally sound having no weak or fragile points with less stress to the overall health of the tree.



According to LSU AgCenter Horticulturalist, Dan Gill, examples of appropriate reasons for pruning include eliminating crossed and rubbing branches, removing low branches, removing weak, thin branches from the inner part of the tree, trimming off old seed pods, removing suckers from the base of the trunk all to give the tree a shapelier appearance. Avoid cutting back or shortening branches larger than your finger, although cutting larger branches back to a side branch or to the trunk, when needed, is fine.

Sometimes crape myrtles are pruned to achieve a certain shape. Nowadays, there are so many varieties available on the market. Some grow tall and upright like a vase while others are shorter and spreading, having more of an umbrella or cascading effect. You cannot make an upright-growing crape myrtle grow into other shapes by cutting it back. The new growth will simply grow upright again. So, if you want a crape myrtle that will mature in the shape you desire, make sure you choose one that naturally grows that way.

With its smooth, muscular trunks, peeling bark, filigree of leafless branches in the winter and exceptionally long blooming season in summer, the crape myrtle is rightfully popular here in Louisiana. Make sure you keep yours looking its best and giving it a healthy life.

If you have any questions over this topic or any other horticulture questions, please contact Mark Carriere, Associate County Agent, at (225)638-5533 or via email at mcarriere@agcenter.lsu.edu.

You can also find out more information on this or other topics by visiting www.lsuagcenter.com.



Spring Gardening is Upon Us

By Mark Carriere, Associate County Agent

With the cold, and abnormally wet winter we have had this year, I believe everyone is looking forward to getting out into the garden. We received some great weather this past weekend, just in time for the Mardi Gras season. With this glimmer of drier and warmer weather, numerous homeowners took to their yard to begin prep work for the coming spring growing season.

Looking ahead to the spring, now's the time to begin to think of your spring vegetable gardens. Whether you plant your garden in a raised bed or directly in the ground, now is the time to start removing weeds and any fall vegetable debris that may be left due to the wet fall/winter we had this year. It is best to remove this debris weeks prior to planting as insects may be overwintering in your garden. By removing these items, you are taking away their shelter and food supply, which in turn will allow your vegetables to get a head start growing this coming year.

It is also a great time to think about soil health. Before you go out and purchase any fertilizer for your home garden, I would recommend taking a soil sample to see exactly what you may need to add to your garden for this coming growing season. The LSU AgCenter Soil Testing Lab is a great place to send your samples. Soil sample kits can be found across the parish at the Pointe Coupee Co-op in Batchelor, LA, Farmers Feed Mill in Maringouin, LA, Tractor Supply in New Roads, LA, or at the Pointe Coupee Parish Extension Office in New Roads, LA. These kits have step-by-step directions on how to take a sample in your lawn or garden, however if you have questions please do not hesitate to give Mark Carriere, Associate County Agent, a call at the Pointe Coupee Extension Office, (225) 638-5533.

Steps to take a soil sample:

1. Divide into areas for sampling on basis of slope, type of plants grown, etc.
2. Sample to depth of 2"-3" for turf and 6" for cultivate beds.
3. Take soil from at least 10 places in each area to obtain a representative sample.
4. Mix thoroughly in a bucket.
5. Remove one pint for lab sample. Label for your reference.
6. Fill out sample form for lab by using a kit or one located at the parish extension office.

It typically takes a week or so to get your results back from the lab. Once you receive the results you can give me a call and we can go over the results together. However, a good rule of thumb according to Dr. Kiki Fontenot with the LSU AgCenter, is that your vegetable garden should have a soil pH between 5.5 and 7.0. Adding lime will increase the soil pH and adding sulfur will decrease soil pH. If you plan to incorporate manure or compost, do so before you take your soil sample. Dr. Fontenot also recommends adding either manure or compost to your garden, but if you do choose manure, make sure it is aged at least 6 months or longer before adding.

So, go ahead and the next time the weather is nice, get out into the garden to get prepared for your spring vegetables, and to get some much-needed Vitamin D. Also, remember to think about submitting that soil sample so you can make the best choices for your garden this coming spring.

For more information about home gardens, soil samples, or other related items, please contact Mark Carriere, Associate County Agent, at the Pointe Coupee Extension Office by calling (225)638-5533 or via email at mcarriere@agcenter.lsu.edu. You can also find more information on these and a variety of other topics at www.lsuagcenter.com.



For more information, contact your local Pointe Coupee LSU AgCenter Office
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Office Hours: Monday – Friday 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

The LSU AgCenter and LSU provides equal opportunities in employment and programs.

For more information, visit the [LSU AgCenter website](#).