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THE GARDEN BENCH

November/December 2022

Gardening and home landscape information from UGA Cooperative Extension in Houston County. Our newsletter provides research-based horticulture information to help Middle Georgia gardeners.

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Special Points of Interest:

→ Homeowner Class

Right Plant Right Place—learn how important it is to plant the right plant in the right place!

Nov 15/5-6 PM/Hafley Park, 1527
Sunshine, Perry/ \$10

→ Master Gardener Extension Volunteer Training Program

For information about either program, contact the Houston County Extension Office at 478-987-2028 or christine.kelly@uga.edu

Planting Dates for Your Winter Vegetable Garden

Although the time has passed for planting most cool-season vegetables, it's not too late to plant asparagus, garlic, and onions!

Dry Onion Bulbs: plant through Nov 10

Asparagus: plant in November & December

Elephant Garlic: plant in November & December

Green Onions: plant through December 31

Plant Spotlight

Cucurbita sp

Pumpkin pie, pumpkin spice latte, pumpkin bread, whole pumpkins, carved pumpkins—you get the picture: pumpkin season is here.

Pumpkins are grown both as fall decorations and for their edible flesh and seeds. Although not difficult to grow, they are highly sensitive to frost and should not be planted until all danger of frost has passed—planting date is often determined by desired date of harvest, with maturity dates ranging from 70-120 days. Early plantings are less subject to insect and disease attack, but must be used within a few weeks of harvest because their quality deteriorates more quickly than those planted later in the year.

Pumpkins prefer a sunny location with plenty of room to spread out. Weed-free, well-drained soil should be prepared by deep tilling and adding organic matter. Soil test to determine the pH and fertility requirements.

They need 1-2 inches of water per week, with the critical period for moisture occurring during fruit set and development. To reduce disease problems, avoid overhead irrigation.

Harvest mature pumpkins using a sharp knife or shears and leaving a 3-4 inch stem on the pumpkin.

Learn more about pumpkin culture at:

https://secure.caes.uga.edu/extension/publications/files/pdf/C%201206_1.PD-5F

and

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/pumpkins-winter-squash/>

Home Garden and Landscape Tips for Middle Georgia

Flowers: Continue planting pansies, snapdragons, calendulas, ornamental cabbage, and kale. For best results, plant pansies before Nov 15, and remember to water and fertilize them. Later plantings will grow more slowly.

Now is the time to plant spring-flowering bulbs such as tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, anemones, and crocus. Choose a sunny spot with well-drained soil and plant bulbs at a depth equal to 2 to 3 times the height of the bulb.

Leave foliage on perennials until after they are killed by the cold weather, then remove the foliage. *Don't prune lantana until next spring.*

Vegetables & Herbs: Harvest any remaining summer vegetables before a killing frost. Remove plants that have stopped producing and clean the garden area of weeds and dead plants to reduce pests that could attack next year's crops. Start planning next year's garden!

Shrubs & Trees: Camellias provide colorful blooms as cold weather arrives. Crape myrtles, red twig dogwoods, birch trees, and many other plants have beautiful bark that looks good in winter.

Shrubs should not be pruned or fertilized now—new growth may be too tender to survive a cold winter. Begin pruning again in January.

If there has been no significant rainfall for one week, water your plants.

Now is a good time to plant shrubs and trees; shrubs and trees planted when they are dormant have an easier time establishing good root systems before they begin actively growing again next spring. Remember to water them at planting time and throughout the winter.

Lawn Tips: Keep leaves and pine straw raked.

Early spring weeds can be controlled in warm-season turf grasses by the application of atrazine or simazine from Nov through Feb. DO NOT use atrazine or simazine on *actively growing* Bermuda lawns!

Winter Protection of Ornamental Plants

There are several things you can do to improve the survival rate of your prized landscape plants this winter.

- Select plants that are suited to your climate and maintain proper plant nutrition.
- Utilize windbreaks such as fences, buildings, or evergreen plants, especially on the northwest side of a planting and consider planting your cold-sensitive plants on a southern wall.
- Avoid doing the following: pruning in late summer or early fall, fertilizing with high nitrogen fertilizers in the fall, and transplanting in late fall or early winter.
- To minimize heat loss, mulch or cover sensitive plants that remain outdoors. Sheets, blankets, or cardboard boxes can be used to cover plants, **but DO NOT USE plastic sheeting!** Remove the cover during the day.
- Push pots together to decrease heat loss from the sides of the containers and wrap the bases of the containers in burlap or blankets.

Soil Testing

Winter is a great time for planning our spring and summer gardens, and the quality of our soil has a direct effect on how those gardens perform. Developing and maintaining productive soils begins with soil testing. Soil tests provide information on the soil's actual nutrient status and give recommendations on appropriate nutrient and lime amendments for optimal growth.

Although soils can be tested any time of the year, it takes time for some amendments to become effective. Lime, for instance, reacts slowly, and if possible, it should be mixed with the soil 2-3 months before planting.

Once medium or high fertility levels are established, lawn and ornamental areas should be sampled every 2-3 years. Vegetable gardens should be sampled every 1-2 years.

Samples cost \$8 and can be dropped off at the extension office. In general, it takes 7-10 days from the time the lab receives the samples until you get the test reports.