



# ***The Garden Bench***

The Garden Bench is a free bi-monthly newsletter from the University of Georgia Extension in Houston County. For more information see: Houston County Extension - [www.ugaextension.org/houston](http://www.ugaextension.org/houston); the Georgia Center for Urban Agriculture – [www.gaurbanag.org](http://www.gaurbanag.org); and Georgia Weather – [www.georgiaweather.net](http://www.georgiaweather.net)

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Willie Chance, Houston County Extension Agent

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## **Winter Gardening**

Finally, the temperature is beginning to fall and we have had a few drops of rain! We are still in Drought Response Level Two – Outdoor water use may occur on scheduled days between the hours of midnight to 10:00 a.m. Gardening in middle Georgia during this historic drought has been difficult for gardeners. It has become even more difficult to gardeners living within north Georgia counties. The state has just declared a Drought Response Level Four – no outdoor watering for the northern 1/3 of Georgia! We may not see an end to this drought soon. The current weather forecast is for a dry, mild Georgia winter.

There are many things we can do wisely use our water and save money. No, we don't need to dig up the lawn or cement it over! Turfgrass helps reduce water runoff and it rids the atmosphere of carbon dioxide! Follow the watering recommendations given to you within this newsletter. The recommendations are research based and provided as a service of the University of Georgia Extension. Use proper techniques in landscape design, installation, and routine maintenance to use water more efficiently in the landscape.

Weeds are your garden's enemies. They rob precious water and nutrients from your garden plants. Give your garden beds a thorough cleanup and refresh the mulch with sterile- weed free mulch materials to give everything a clean appearance. Get those new garden beds prepared by tilling and adding soil amendments as required. Don't forget to get a soil test! Organic soil amendments such as compost and ground pine bark are useful to improve sandy or clay soils. Do not add them to individual planting holes. Rather, dig large beds and add them uniformly to the entire bed.

This is a great time to plant shrubs, trees and perennials! Camellias provide colorful blooms as cold weather arrives. Encore azaleas will give you good plant structure and color at least twice a year. Native Azaleas are wonderful deciduous shrubs that come in a variety of bloom colors. Crape myrtles, red-twig dogwood, birch and other plants have beautiful bark that looks good even in the winter. Consider adding maples, gingko, or other fall color trees to your landscape for striking autumn color.

Shrubs take at least six months to become established while trees take a year or more. If there has been no significant rainfall for one week, water your plants. This is especially important for new plantings. On new plants, direct the water to the root ball. Watering the soil around the plant may not be enough to keep new plant roots moist and alive. Be patient with new plantings!

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*The Garden Bench*, a gardening publication of the University of Georgia Extension Service in Houston County, is published in both English and Spanish. If you would like to receive it by email, contact us at [tberry1@alltel.net](mailto:tberry1@alltel.net) It is also available in bulk for clubs and organizations or as single copies at Houston County garden centers. Call the Extension Office for details on receiving bulk copies – (478) 987-2028.

## Lawns

Now that your lawn is going dormant, give it one final edging for a clean, neat appearance. Keep leaves and pine straw raked off the lawn to prevent damage to the lawn by matted, rain soaked leaves. Reduce early spring weeds by applying an herbicide in late December. The best method of weed control is the easiest - don't let them grow! See this site to select the right herbicide for your lawn – [www.ent.uga.edu/pmh/Hm\\_Turf.pdf](http://www.ent.uga.edu/pmh/Hm_Turf.pdf) Don't waste your money on the "winterizer" fertilizers. They are generally unnecessary for lawns fertilized earlier in the year. Most lawns should not be fertilized after September 15. Don't fertilize newly planted sod.

## Flowers

Have fun and add a pop of color to your winter garden with mixed plantings of snapdragons, pansies, violas and herbs such as parsley. Don't remove any foliage from perennials until it is killed by the cold weather. After a killing frost, remove the foliage. As you clean out the flower beds, mark the spots where late starting perennials will come up next spring to avoid damaging them. Renew mulch in flower beds for a fresh look. Mulch should be two to four inches deep. Do not pile it up around the base of the plant. Don't prune back lantana until next spring. When cut the stems will hold rain water and either freeze or cause the plant crown to rot.

## Vegetables / Herbs

Remove plants that have stopped producing, weeds, or any dead plant material from the garden. Harvest any remaining summer vegetables before a killing frost. They could hide pests that can attack next year's garden. Remove, clean and store any tomato cages or fencing. Make a note on what vegetables did the best and which ones did not. As you plan next year's vegetable garden see this site for a vegetable gardening calendar or contact your local Extension office - <http://pubs.caes.uga.edu/caespubs/pubcd/B577.htm>

## Container Gardening / Holiday Plants

Bring tender plants indoors to avoid damage from frost. Water container plantings when the soil dries out to a depth of about ½ inch or so. Add water until it runs out the drainage holes. You can use one application of a slow release fertilizer to feed annuals and cool season perennials in containers all winter long. Select a slow release fertilizer that will release nutrients in the cooler weather. Water soluble fertilizers will also work but need to be added regularly. Read the label for directions. Container planting is a great way to add holiday cheer at your front door. Small trees or shrubs and even Rosemary plants can be used in containers. Simply add ornaments, bows and lights to complete your design. Be sure to use low wattage outdoor lights.



Rosemary

Extend the life of your Christmas trees, poinsettias, and Amaryllis plants by placing them in a cool, draft free location in your home. Be sure to water as needed.

## Gardening Gifts

If you are looking for a great gift for your gardening friends, the full color **2008 Gardener's Calendar is a bargain at just \$8 a copy**. The calendar is a peek through the garden gate at several Master Gardeners personal gardens. It also features gardening tips for every month of the year. We also have a Garden Journal available for \$5. The journal offers more in depth gardening tips. The journal and calendar are published especially for gardeners by the Houston County Master Gardeners. Calendars are available at the Extension Office.



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