

Tips for the Landscape and Garden

Tips adapted from Bob Westerfield, State Consumer Horticulturist for the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service, and Walter Reeves, Retired Extension agent for DeKalb County and Saturday Morning Gardening Show Host on WSB Radio.



Ornamentals and Turf

Variety in form and texture is important when designing a planting. However, too many different types of mixtures of plant materials should be avoided because it can create a confused or cluttered appearance as well as increased maintenance.

Do not forget wildlife when creating a landscape plan. They need both living and dead trees for survival.

Place stakes in intended planting spots and view from several angles to help you picture how new plants will look. Once you have the plants ready to plant, always place them, still in the pots, where you intend to plant and step back and view the whole area one last time before committing the plant to the ground.

Apply pre-emergence weed control in late February to home lawns. Do not use pre-emergent weed control if you are planning to re-plant or re-seed your lawn.

Check indoor plants for insects like spider mites, scale, and mealybugs. Remember to spray the undersides of the leaves to get good control.

Tip-burn or edge-burn on leaves of houseplants indicates that more water is being lost than absorbed. Check soil for dryness.

This is a great time to plant bare root roses. Select a quality plant with at least 3 to 5 strong canes.

Prune hybrid tea roses now, removing old canes and lowering plant down to a height of 12-15". Knock-out Roses should be pruned 16-18 inches below where you want blooms.

Start slow-developing flowers inside such as alyssum, coleus, dusty miller, geranium, impatiens, marigold, petunia, phlox, portulaca, salvia, vinca, and verbena in January and February.

Trees with large cavities in their trunks should be evaluated yearly as to whether they should be removed for safety reasons. When a cavity takes up over 75 percent of a limb or trunk, the wood could give way anytime. A certified arborist can provide valuable advice about the health of your trees.

Fruit

If you want to raise fruit in your garden, try blueberries, grapes, raspberries, or strawberries. It is much less difficult to succeed with them than with tree fruits, and you will get much faster results.

Producing insect and disease-free fruit trees requires a thorough spray program, proper pruning, and good cultural practices. Give thought to this before planting a backyard orchard.

Native chestnuts cannot be grown because of their susceptibility to blight, but if you like chestnuts, plant the grafted Chinese varieties such as Crane, Nanking or Orrin. These are fine landscape trees and provide nuts within three to four years after they are planted.

Peaches grow best when maintained with an open center (no central leader). Keep three or four strong, scaffold branches evenly distributed around the trunk. Limbs that branch out at a 60-degree angle are preferred, but spreaders can be used to widen narrow crotch angles.

Grapevine pruning can be made into attractive wreaths. Decorate them with cut-out hearts, dried flowers, or bird nests, or shape them into a heart over a wire frame for use as Valentine gifts.

Prune fruit trees and grapes in late February or early March, after the worst of the winter cold is passed, but before spring growth begins. For disease and insect control, cut out dead wood and dispose of the pruning.

Fruit trees, such as peaches, pears, apples and plums, can be sprayed now with dormant oils to reduce insect problems.

Vegetables

Even under ideal storage conditions, some vegetable seeds have a short life and probably will not be good one or two years after purchase. These include sweet corn, onion, okra, bean, and parsnip.

A frequently overlooked factor in vegetable garden planning is the date of the family vacation. Choose planting dates and varieties carefully, so your garden will not be ready for a full harvest when you are out of town.

Early varieties of onions are most productive when grown from transplants (small plants) or from sets (small, onion bulbs grown from seed the previous season). Direct seeding is satisfactory for growing green onions or for late varieties.

Before working an area in the garden for early spring planting, check the soil. It should be dry enough to crumble in your hands before you work it.

Weed seeds will sprout after a few days of warm weather, then, will be killed by frost and lack of light.

Repair and paint window boxes, lawn furniture, tools, and other items in preparation for outdoor gardening and recreational use.

This is a great time to start seeds for summer annual flowers and vegetables. Check germination rates on

seed packets and count back 4 to six weeks from average last frost date in your area. Atlanta's average last frost date is around April 15.

Use a sterile seed starting mix to help avoid damping off—a fungal disease that kills seedlings. Plant in seed starting flats with 2-3 seeds per section. Deep sections are better for root growth than wide sections.

You can also use containers from around the kitchen as well. Salad containers with lids create a mini green house, egg carton bottoms make individual plants cells, and plastic food containers that are not too deep work well. Just be sure to provide drainage holes in the bottom so seedlings do not get waterlogged.

Once seeds sprout—use sharp scissors to cut out the weakest seedlings to give one sprout room to grow without competition for space and nutrients. Avoid pulling the extra seedlings as this disturbs the roots.

Use half strength fertilizer when watering and water from the bottom if possible. If watering from the top mist gently. A heat mat made for seed starting provides bottom heat and encourages quicker growth. Remove starting trays from heat once seeds have sprouted.

Using a plant light hung close to the seed tray encourages bushy, compact growth. Raise the light as the seedlings grow but not too high at a time - you do not want leggy seedlings. A little air movement will also encourage strong seedling stems.

When seedlings get their second to third set of true leaves, they can be repotted into larger seed section trays or small individual pots to grow on until ready to plant outside. Continue half-strength fertilizer every few weeks. Strong roots are the goal here.

A week before planting out into the garden harden off seedlings by giving them slightly more outside time each day. This helps the seedlings adjust to real sunlight slowly and acclimate to outside temperatures.

Plan your garden on graph paper by measuring the area you want to plant. Read seed packets / plant tags for how close vegetables and flowers can be planted to each other for optimum growth. When you first plant young plants outside the areas will seem a bit bare but plants will grow in quickly and fill the space. Plants need room to grow and air movement to avoid disease that can occur when plants are too crowded. Mulch

open areas between plants to reduce weeds and help the soil retain moisture. Do not forget to label seedlings when planting.

[Link to Vegetable Planting Chart from University of Georgia Extension](#)

UGA Extension Gwinnett
750 South Perry Street, Suite 400
Lawrenceville GA 30046-4804
678.377.4010

extension.uga.edu/county-offices/gwinnett

