



The Garden Bench

The Garden Bench is a free bi-monthly newsletter from the University of Georgia Extension in Houston County. We provide research based information to assist Middle Georgia gardeners. For more information see these websites: UGA Extension Service - www.ugaextension.org; the Georgia Center for Urban Agriculture – www.gaurbanag.org; and Georgia Weather – www.georgiaweather.net

July - August 2006

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Welcome to summer in the South! This is the best season of all. Our gardening efforts are beginning to yield beautiful flowers, tomatoes, watermelon, and more squash than the family or neighbors can eat.

In response to your questions, we have added a container gardening section to this newsletter. Container gardening is a perfect solution for limited spaces. They can also make wonderful focal points in a large garden.

We are getting a lot of questions from home gardeners regarding watering restrictions. We are dealing with state and county water restrictions here in middle-Georgia that may become a full ban on outside watering. We offer these helpful tips for coping.

Coping with Water Restrictions

Mulch is one of the best investments you can make in the summer landscape. It traps moisture in the soil, making it available to the plants longer. Mulch 2 to 4 inches deep around trees out to the edge of their canopy. Use deeper mulch depth with coarser textured mulches like bark and wood chip mulches. This helps retain moisture and will enhance the appearance of your landscape.

***Newspapers aren't just for reading any more.** They make excellent mulch around shrubs and flowers. It will also add organic matter to the soil as it decomposes. Use a leaf rake to gently pull back the mulch you have now. Dip newspaper in a bucket of water and spread it two sheets thick over the

ground. Then put the mulch back to hide the newspaper and hold it in place.

*** Get a rain gauge.** Most Georgia soils need only an inch of water per week. If it rains, subtract that amount from your total application.

*** Water at night, after 10 p.m. and before 10 a.m.** With nighttime watering, you lose less water to evaporation.

*** Don't wait until flowers, shrubs and trees wilt** to give them a drink of water. **Water early in the day so the plant won't get into stress.** That results in healthier plants overall. It is okay to let your lawn wilt occasionally.

*** Use the "finger test"** to tell when your plants need water. **Poke your finger a few inches into the soil and see if it's moist.** If it is, don't water.

*** Drip or trickle irrigation** is a great way to water. Drip watering uses low pressure and puts the water at the root zone where it will do the most good for the plant. Drip irrigation uses about one-third of the water a sprinkler uses. **Water no more often than once a week. On new plants direct water to the root ball.**

*** Don't water** on hot, windy afternoons. You'll lose more than half of your water to evaporation.

*** Don't over fertilize or use herbicides.** These require water to be active and can damage plants. Over fertilizing leads to a landscape that will be a water hog. A soil test from your Extension Service office will tell you the soil's fertilizer and lime requirements.

Fruit and Nut Trees

*** Fertilize established figs** if they are watered.

*** Water fruit trees** once a week, when the soil

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 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.

dries out.

* **Apply mulch around fruit trees** but do not place it right up against the tree trunk as this creates a path for insects and disease.

* Prevent disease by promptly disposing of all fallen fruit, leaves, and dead limbs.

* Continue using the 'Home Orchard' or 'Home Fruit Tree' sprays as needed.

Trees and Shrubs

* Remove faded flowers from crape myrtles.

Fertilize and water **to encourage a second bloom.**

Be careful not to cut off newly emerging flowers.

* **Do not prune or fertilize spring flowering shrubs** like azalea, camellia, and viburnum after mid-July. It may interfere with next year's flowers. Keep them watered as mentioned above.

* **Watch for damaging insects on shrubs** like euonymus, azalea, camellia, pyracantha, holly, gardenia, and pittosporum. Scale, spider mites, lacebug and spittle bugs are active now.

* Spray roses for insects and disease as needed.

Lawns

* The **most important practice for a healthy lawn** is to **keep it mowed at the right height.** Don't remove more than 1/3 the grass blade height at a mowing.

* **Check mower blades to ensure a sharp cut** that will not damage the lawn by tearing grass blades.

* **Do not fertilize lawns** if they will not be watered properly or are water stressed.

* Water only when needed and then water deeply with ¾ to 1 inch of water. This should be no more often than once or twice a week!

Container Gardening

* **Use containers to grow almost anything, vegetables, flowers, small shrubs and trees.**

* **Any container** will work if it has good drainage (and the neighbors don't object).

* Use a **quality potting soil mix that drains well.**

* **Elevate containers** placed on patios, driveways or walks. This helps with drainage and will help keep pots cooler. Use pot feet or bricks.

* The two most important practices for containers are **watering and fertilizing.** What you plant in the container determines the type of fertilizer needed. Consider using a controlled release fertilizer at planting and you may not have to fertilize again for several months. If using liquid fertilizers, apply

according to the label – about every two weeks. Stick your finger into the soil to your knuckle. If the soil is dry then water it well until water comes out of the bottom of the pot.

Flowers

* Prune or **“dead-head” old flowers** off perennials and annuals. Fertilize annuals and perennials. **Plant or move irises and daylilies** beginning in late August.

* **Renew mulch** in flower beds for a fresh look.

* **Start seeds** of favorite biennials and other fall flowers in pots. Seedlings should be ready for transplanting in the fall.

Vegetables / Herbs

* **Herbs need well drained soil.** With regular watering they thrive in hot, dry environments. For best flavor & scent, **harvest herbs in early morning.**

* **Keep vegetables harvested,** well watered and fertilized to continue production. Fertilize every four weeks. Water twice a week with ¾ inch of water. Mulch to control weeds and slow water loss.

* **Plant vegetables early enough** to allow time for them to mature before we receive a killing frost. Plant okra before July 1 and corn and eggplants by July 15. Before August 1, plant southern peas and winter squash. Plant tomatoes by August 10 and summer squash and snap beans by August 20. Plant cucumbers before September 1. Plant carrots August 20 – September 15.

* **Start plants** for broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, and kale in a half-shaded area or in pots.

Get planting beds ready for September and October planting of these cool season vegetables.

Till, fertilize, and prepare the seedbed to give it time to settle.



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