

Green Garden News

Blue is for Boys, and the Garden

Blue is one of the colors that catches your eye when used in the garden and is a color we all treasure.

The word "blue" itself can cause confusion and invoke several different feelings or thoughts because it carries a lot of meanings in the English culture and language.

Blue in the United States flag signifying vigilance, perseverance and justice. Perhaps you've said a friend is "true blue," which kind of coincides with the perseverance definition.

A light blue ribbon on a mailbox signifies proud parents of a new baby boy. In those first weeks and months, parents often dress infants in blue so people will know he is not a she.

Some people describe their mood as blue when they are a little depressed. Elvis even sang it in the words, "I'll have a blue Christmas without you." The terms "blue movies" and "blue-eyed floozies" are polite ways to refer to questionable topics.

In the horticultural world, blue causes the most laughter and ridicule among plant breeders, or I should say those who name new plants. Most plants that are described as having a blue flower are invariably a shade of purple.

I once heard a plant breeder say that if the new flower is not orange or yellow, then they have a right to call

it blue. This was obviously a tongue-in-cheek effort to poke fun at himself.

What we do know is that most of us want some blue in our gardens. It is the ultimate cool color, and I don't mean "in vogue," either. Who doesn't want to swim in the clear, blue water of the Caribbean or doesn't look with envy at the neighbor's pool on a hot, sunny day?

Blue is unique in that if you give it a hint of another color, you still have a shade of blue. Oddly, these blue shades work harmoniously with each other. Red is opposite. Give it a little white and you've got pink, and add a little yellow and you've got orange. Start putting these together and you've got clashes.

Right now, the old-fashioned larkspurs standing so erect are starting to bloom in riotous shades of blue. For summer, I love blue salvias like Victoria Blue, last year's All-America winner Evolution and the new Mystic Spires Blue. I love blue petunias like Easy Wave Blue, Suncatcher Sapphire Blue and Sanguna Atomic Blue, which you'll want if you ever have a chance to see it.

Almost every verbena series has some great blues. Look for Aztec, Tapien, Temari, Tukana and Wildfire. For rock-solid, tough-as-nails, summer-long blue, you can't beat

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May Garden Tips

Flowers

- Annuals to plant include celosia, coleus, crossandra, gaillardia, geranium, hollyhock, impatiens, kalanchoe, marigold, nicotiana, ornamental pepper, penta, phlox, portulaca, salvia, torenia, verbena, vinca and zinnia.
- Fertilize annual and perennial flowerbeds. Choose a product that contains nitrogen and potassium, but little or no phosphorus for this purpose.
- Rejuvenate houseplants. Take them outdoors and inspect for spider mites and mealy bugs. Shift pot bound specimens to a size larger pot.
- Set out caladium bulbs in prepared beds. Plant them 18 inches apart and 2 inches deep.
- Control black spot on roses by applying fungicides on a regular basis.
- Sow sunflower seeds. Sunflowers are easy to grow in a sunny spot. Look for newer, dwarf varieties.

Trees and Shrubs

- Finish pruning spring flowering shrubs such as azaleas, spiraeas, camellias and forsythia.
- Water newly planted shrubs and trees frequently until they are well established. Smaller shrubs require about three months of special care while new roots are becoming established, while large shrubs and trees require six months to a year.
- Watch for these pests on ornamentals and control as necessary:
 - Spider mites on Japanese hollies
 - Lacebugs on azaleas and pyracantha
 - Scales on camellias and hollies
 - Whiteflies on ligustrum and gardenias

Fruits and Nuts

- Fertilize citrus with a special "citrus fertilizer". Be sure it contains about 1.6% magnesium, about 0.5% manganese and small amounts of copper and boron.

Vegetable Garden

- Vegetables that can be planted outdoors include eggplant, lima beans, okra, southern peas, and sweet potatoes.
- On sandy sites, vegetables will require several light, supplemental applications of fertilizer during the season. Choose a product that contains nitro-

gen and potassium, but little or no phosphorus for this purpose.

- Check for the following pests and control them if necessary:
 - Tomato fruitworm
 - Stinkbugs on vegetables
 - Aphids on all new growth

Lawns

- Calibrate the lawn sprinkler system so that approximately ½ inch of water is applied at each irrigation. Contact your local Extension Service for specific instructions.
- Water lawns in the morning to help prevent disease problems.
- Check for the following lawn pests and control them if necessary: Spittlebugs in centipede grass, Chinch bugs in St. Augustine, Sod webworm in all turf.

Lawnmower Maintenance Tips

We wouldn't think of not servicing our automobiles on a regular basis, but yet, we run these small engines week after week just a foot or so above the ground amidst dust and debris. To get the best performance and extend the life of your mower the following suggestions are recommended:

- Do an overall safety check making sure all guards, belt shields, cut-off switches, etc. are in place and working properly
- Inspect the decking for any weak or broken parts including blades, wheels and rollers. Pay particular attention to the blades to be sure they are not worn to an unsafe condition and keep them sharp for a much cleaner cut. A sharp blade puts much less strain on the engine therefore increases efficiency.
- The engine should be serviced routinely throughout the mowing season, but as you begin the spring landscaping activities consider draining the oil and replacing it with clean fresh oil along with the oil filter if your mower has one. Replacing the spark plug could provide easier starting, increased power and better fuel efficiency. The air filter is critical to extending the life of these small engines. Depending on the type of air cleaner on your engine servicing should follow manufacture recommendations. Many of the smaller engines have only a foam filter that should be washed with soapy water, dried, and lightly oiled before reinstalling.

Spending a few dollars and a little time getting your mower ready for the season will be a wise investment and you, your lawn mower, and the lawn will be the benefactors.

Okra in the Garden

Okra (also sometimes called gumbo) is a favorite vegetable of the South. It is valued especially for use in gumbo. This nutritious vegetable will act as a thickening agent with its pod mucilage. It's a warm-season crop, so it is found in many summer gardens when few things will grow.

Start okra in mid spring when soils have warmed well, or use black plastic mulch to warm early spring soil. It may be best to wait for warm soil, because a good start is important for successful okra production.

Soak the okra seeds overnight in warm tap water to soften the hard seed coats. Some gardeners lightly scratch the seed on sandpaper to open the tough seed coat. Plant the seed about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch deep, and space plants 15-18 inches apart in well-developed rows with only moderate soil fertility.

Soil pH should be 5.9 to 7.2. More acid soil will reduce growth and pucker young plant leaves.

Start with a fertilizer of lower nitrogen and higher phosphorous and potassium. About 3 pounds of 8-24-24 per 100 ft. of row is all you need preplant. Sidedress this long-term crop every month or more with nitrogen, using almost 1 pound of nitrogen fertilizer per 100 ft. If growth is rank, production may drop off; so avoid overfertilizing and reduce sidedressings.

Popular cultivars include: Annie Oakley II, Cajun Delight and Green's Best for hybrid choices.

Open-pollinated cultivars for this area include La. Green Velvet, Emerald and Clemson Spineless.

Okra likes hot weather; when the pods start coming on strong, be sure to keep plants well picked to extend pod-setting growth. Old pods left to go to seed reduce total yields. Harvest pods every other day. A pod too small (no such thing) is much better than one a little too big. Ideal pods have a non-fibrous tip that snaps when pushed with the thumb. Discard all hard pods as soon as discovered.

In mid summer when plants are tall, they may be cut back to 12-18 inches to resprout and regrow at a workable height. This is a good time to sidedress with fertilizer to restore new growth.

Okra pods are tender and store well for about a week in refrigeration. Blanch and freeze any that won't be eaten soon.

Some problems we see on okra include stinkbugs, nematodes, aphids, fire ants, high fertility, skin irritation to gardener, pod rot in extended rains, pod bruising with rough handling and post-harvest pod desiccation.

—by LSU AgCenter



Prime pod size for moderate to small pod cultivars.



Okra is sensitive to acid soils.



Bug damage distorts pod growth.

Upcoming Events

Plant Clinics: Having problems with your lawn or plants? If so, take advantage of diagnostic plant clinics offered by the UF/IFAS Santa Rosa County Extension and the Santa Rosa County Master Gardeners. Plant clinics are now offered at all three Santa Rosa County Extension Offices.

In Milton, the plant clinic will be conducted every Monday during the spring and summer from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Extension office located at 6263 Dogwood Drive, Milton.

In Gulf Breeze, the plant clinic is conducted every Tuesday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. year round. The clinic is held at the South Santa Rosa Service Center located at 5841 Gulf Breeze Parkway (next to The Zoo on Hwy 98).

In Jay, the plant clinic will be staffed by Santa Rosa County Master Gardeners on the first and third Monday of each month from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. during the spring and summer months. The clinic will be held at the Extension Office located in the Jay Community Center at 5259 Booker Lane, Jay.

May 17, 2007: Panhandle Butterfly House Season Opening Event. Please join us for the official opening of the Panhandle Butterfly House. Located in Na-



varre Park at the north end of the Navarre Bridge on Hwy 98. Flutter by and see our redesigned gardens and be surrounded by butterflies. Open to the public.

The Panhandle Butterfly House will be open to the public on Thursdays-Saturday from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM and on Sundays from noon to 4:00 PM.

May 12, 2007: 7th Annual Emerald Coast Secret Garden Tour. There will be six gardens featured on this year's tour. The tour is located in southeast Pensacola on either end of Bayou Texar. Tickets are available at the Garden Center located at 1850 North 9th Avenue in Pensacola on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. Tickets are \$8. For more information call 850-478-8944

For persons with disabilities requiring special accommodations, please contact the SRC Extension Office at least 5 working days prior to the program so that proper consideration may be given to the request.
(850) 623-3868

Cannas

Cannas are perennials that are valued for their large tropical-looking foliage and showy, colorful flowers.

Canna flowers come in vibrant colors like ivory, yellow, rose, salmon, and crimson. Canna foliage is just as ornamental, and may be pure green, greenish blue, coppery to purplish, ruby, or even green with white stripes.



Cultivars of cannas can range from a foot-and-a-half in height to more than six feet tall. They can be grown as borders, or in masses in beds.

Cannas do best in well-drained, loamy soil rich in organic matter, and they love the sun. They even do well in our hot Florida summers, with enough water.

Try out this lovely and versatile plant in your landscape!

Questions and Answers

Q: My gardenias are flowering, but they have become overgrown and don't have a desirable shape. When is the best time to prune them?

A: Prune as soon as they have finished flowering. This will be sometime in mid to late June. Don't delay more than a few weeks because gardenias will need time to make summer growth and initiate buds before fall. Avoid any heavy pruning during the fall, winter or early spring. The removal of an occasional unsightly branch or excessively vigorous shoot can be done any time that it occurs.

Research in Florida indicates that pruning should be done after flowering, but early enough to allow new growth to be at least 4 to 6 inches long by early October. Pruning after October 1st would decrease next year's blooms.

Q: I've already seen a few mole crickets. How do I get rid of them?

A: Many people apply an insecticide during late winter to early spring (February-April) to control mole crickets. This is a waste of time, money and product. Insecticide treatments in the spring, when only adults are present, are not recommended because adults are not easily killed and the chances of reinfestation from subsequent flights and unhatched eggs are high.

The best time to treat for mole crickets, based on extensive research, is during **mid June through July**. Proper timing of the insecticide application is one of the most important parts of mole cricket management. Although lawns can suffer some damage in the spring, it's better to mark areas of mole cricket activity and target those areas for treatment in mid June through July after the eggs have all hatched and before the nymphs (immature mole crickets) are large enough to do much damage. But don't treat at all if there is no evidence of mole cricket activity.

During the mid June through July time frame, you can use a soap flush technique to confirm mole cricket activity. Mix 1½ fluid ounces of a lemon scented liquid dishwashing soap in two gallons of water in a sprinkling can or bucket. Pour the

soapy water over an area approximately four square feet where you suspect mole crickets are active. Count the number of mole crickets that emerge. It only takes several minutes for mole crickets to crawl to the surface after the soap treatment if they are present. Repeat the process around the yard where you suspect mole cricket problems. If you flush an average of two to four crickets per site, treat the lawn with an insecticide. Follow up with spot treatments if any crickets escape the first insecticide treatment.

There are a number of products on the market to control mole crickets. Look for products that contain the following active ingredients: bifenthrin, cyfluthrin, deltamethrin, fipronil, imidacloprid, lambda-cyhalothrin or permethrin. Before using any product for mole cricket control first identify the problem as mole cricket damage by using the soap flush technique. Then choose an insecticide that lists mole crickets on its label. And finally read the container carefully for use directions, application techniques, irrigation requirements and precautions.

Q: Some of the leaves on my southern magnolia tree have turned yellow and have begun to fall. Is this normal? If not, what is causing this and what can I do?

A: The condition that you describe is perfectly normal at this time of year. Southern magnolia is an evergreen, but even evergreen trees and shrubs shed leaves periodically and replace them with new ones - just not all at once like deciduous trees do. Imagine how weather beaten, bug eaten and tired a leaf would look if it stayed on a tree for 20 or 30 years!

Watch other broadleaf evergreen plants over the next month or so and you will see the same thing happening. Typically, about 10 to 30 percent of the leaves will turn a bright yellow and fall, to be quickly replaced with new foliage. Though not as visible as is seen on magnolia, this happens every May or June on such plants as evergreen azaleas, gardenias, hollies and camellias.

Blue for the Garden

(Continued from page 1)

scaevola, the fan flower from Australia. For the shade garden, consider the blue-foliage hosta selections.

Lastly, remember that blue works with any other color in the garden. Its opposite is orange. This is a marriage made in gardening heaven. Put it with red, and you have the beginning of a patriotic garden.

Blue is incredibly unique. Purples and violets will start to disappear with sunset, but plants like scaevola, Biloxi Blue verbena and even spiderwort almost glow iridescently just before dark. It's because our eyes are more sensitive to blues at dusk.

Incorporate some blue flowers in your garden this season and you'll be singing the blues happily.

*—by Norman Winter, MSU Horticulturist
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