Selecting Healthy Transplants for the Home Garden

Purchasing vegetable transplants is a common way for home gardeners to start their garden in the spring. While starting plants from seed offers advantages including lower cost and greater range of available varieties, the convenience of purchasing transplants is also attractive. Transplants are available at many garden stores and nurseries. Selecting healthy transplants can help to ensure a successful garden.

When purchasing transplants be sure to select varieties that are well suited to our region. Plants are often available early in the season, which may lead to plants being transplanted prior to recommended dates. Planting too early can lead to plants being damaged by cold temperatures. When selecting plants also keep in mind varieties that are resistant to common diseases. Recommended varieties and planting dates can be found on the MSU Extension website or by calling your county Extension office.

While it is tempting to purchase the largest plants, these are generally not the best transplants. Select plants that are stocky, medium-sized, with dark green coloration. The presence of flowers or fruit may indicate the plant has been stressed and may perform poorly. Care should also be taken to ensure that plants are free from insects and disease.

Transplants should be closely inspected to ensure that no insects are present on the plant. Aphids and whiteflies are occasionally found on transplants despite the best efforts of nursery staff. Whiteflies are easy to detect as the adults will be visible flying when the plant is disturbed. Aphids may not be visible unless you check the underside of leaves. Disease symptoms on transplants may be checked for by looking for dark colored lesions on stems. Avoid plants with leaves that appear wilted or spotted, or those with brown leaf edges. Carefully remove a few transplants from their containers to check the root system. Roots should be white and fibrous. Root rot diseases are a common problem for vegetable transplants and will often result in roots that are black or dark brown.

Transplants are an easy and convenient way to start your spring vegetable garden. Taking these steps to select the healthiest plants available will help you have a successful garden throughout the season.
## Upcoming Events for April 2019

### Hancock County Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Beginning with Beekeeping</td>
<td>12:00 p.m. until 2:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Bay St. Louis Tractor Supply</td>
<td>This program will provide an introduction to beekeeping for homeowners including native plants for bees, basic bee biology, recommended equipment, and how to manage your bees throughout the year. Presenter is Dr. Christian Stephenson, Hancock County Extension Agent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Gardening and Health</td>
<td>2:00 p.m. until 3:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Pass Christian Public Library</td>
<td>This program will include discussion of the health benefits experienced by gardeners as well as ways to adapt your garden to your physical capabilities. Tabletop and container gardening for limited mobility will be discussed. Presenter is Dr. Christian Stephenson, Hancock County Extension Agent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Treating Common Garden Pests</td>
<td>10:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Pine Hills Nursery at 7434 Cuevas Rd., Pass Christian</td>
<td>This program will include discussion of common insect and disease problems encountered in the home garden and landscape; as well as ways to avoid or manage these problems. Presenter is Dr. Christian Stephenson, Hancock County Extension Agent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Weeds in the Home Landscape</td>
<td>2:00 p.m. until 3:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Bay St. Louis Public Library</td>
<td>This program will include how to identify and manage common weeds in the home lawn and garden. Presenter is Dr. Christian Stephenson, Hancock County Extension Agent.</td>
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### Harrison County Events

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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pond Management Workshop</td>
<td>6:00 p.m.</td>
<td>The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks</td>
<td>The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, along with Harrison County Extension, will host a Pond Management Workshop at the Coastal Research Extension Center located at 1815 Popps Ferry Rd. in Biloxi. Stephen Brown with MDWFP will be the presenter. To register or for more information contact Tim Ray at 228-865-4227 or by email at <a href="mailto:tim.ray@msstate.edu">tim.ray@msstate.edu</a>.</td>
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### Pearl River County Events

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pearl River-Stone County Forestry Association Meeting</td>
<td>12:00 noon</td>
<td>The Sawmill Restaurant, 2205 Highway 49, Wiggins, MS</td>
<td>Butch Bailey will discuss The Future of Forestry in South MS.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Pearl River County Master Gardener Garden Clinic</td>
<td>8:30 a.m. until 2:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Crossroads Feed &amp; Seed, 3854 Highway 26 West, Poplarville, MS 39470</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Financial Literacy</td>
<td>11:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon</td>
<td>The Senior Center of South Pearl River County</td>
<td>Presenter: Dawn Vosbien, Pearl River County Extension Agent. No RSVP required.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Square Foot Gardening</td>
<td>10:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m.</td>
<td>The Crosby Arboretum, Picayune, MS</td>
<td>Want to grow your own vegetables, but think you don’t have the space, time, or energy? Join Pearl River County Extension Agent Dr. Eddie Smith to learn just how easy and fun this method of gardening can be. Program is $3 for members and $5 for non-members. Call 601-799-2311 to register for the program.</td>
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### Stone County Events

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<td>5</td>
<td>2019 Landscape Symposium pre-registration deadline</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Once again it is time for our annual Landscape Symposium in Stone County. The date is April 5, 2019, at the Gulf Coast Community College, Perkinston Campus, just off Highway 49 in Perkinston (straight up Highway 49 from the Coast). Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. The program starts at 9:00 a.m. Watch for the signs to get you to the campus and the correct building (student center building) on the campus. Mark the date and join us. Master Gardener training hours are available. Lunch is included. Program ends about 2:00 p.m. Registration after March 22 and on-site is $15.00. Call 601-928-5286 to pre-register and pay at the door.</td>
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</table>
Garden Calendar: April

**Planting**
- Divide Violets, Shasta Daisies, Liriope, Ajuga, Mums and other Perennials.
- Plant Okra, Melons, Peas, Corn, Beans, Eggplant, Cucumbers, and Tomatoes.
- Set out Basil.
- Set out summer annuals if danger of frost is past: Ageratum, Alyssum, Begonias, Geraniums, Dianthus, Celosia, Marigolds, Moss Rose, Petunias, Impatiens, Coleus, and Caladiums.
- Plant summer and fall blooming bulbs: Callas, Cannas, Dahlias, Gladiolus, and Gloriosa Lilies.
- Sow Zinnias for early summer blooms.

**Fertilizing**
- Fertilize Tomatoes with 10-10-10

**Pruning**
- Remove any freeze-damaged and dead wood.
- Prune Azaleas during or after blooming. Remove faded flowers from Kurume Azaleas.
- Prune flowering shrubs after they finish blooming. If pruning can be done while the shrub is flowering, the trimmed off parts can be brought indoors for floral displays.
- Disbud roses and peonies for specimen flowers.

**Mulch**
- Always mulch in new plantings to help assure success.

**Miscellaneous**
- National Arbor Day is the fourth Friday of April.
- Paint and repair garden furniture and other hard construction (bird bath, bird houses, mailbox, deck, etc.).
- Buy Azaleas in bloom to be sure of color.
Vermicomposting

Vermicompost is an excellent material that can be used to improve the structure of garden soil. The addition of vermicompost can improve the performance of both vegetable and ornamental plants. Traditional composting relies on the action of bacteria and fungi to break down organic materials. In vermicomposting, this break down is accomplished by earthworms, as well as some insect species. The end result of vermicomposting is commonly called "worm castings".

The greatest advantage of vermicomposting is that the traditional composting process can require several months, while vermicomposting can produce results much faster, possibly in just a few days. Excellent materials to be used for vermicomposting include leftover food wastes such as fruit rinds, coffee grounds and tea bags. When added, these materials should be ground or chopped as finely as possible to increase their surface area and speed their breakdown. Avoid adding meat and dairy food wastes as these can attract pests.

The most common worm species used in vermicomposting is the red worm, *Eisenia foetida*. This worm species is native throughout most of the temperate regions and can tolerate a wide range of temperature and moisture conditions. Additionally, red worms are surface feeders and can usually be found in the top three inches of the soil.

Most vermicompost bins are constructed out of a series of containers and use the natural tendency of the worms to migrate upwards when feeding. Organic material can be added to the top of the bin to keep the worms near the surface. When the vermicompost gets to a certain depth, the bottom layer is removed and takes little effort to sort out worms. Worm bins can be purchased for prices ranging from $50 to $200. They can be constructed fairly easily from materials available at most home improvement stores. Start with a plastic bin or tote and drill holes in the top to allow for aeration. Add three to four inches of bedding material such as moist peat moss. Add one-half pound of worms for each square foot of surface area. Worms will rapidly multiply. Kitchen scraps added to the bin should be buried to discourage flies. Three weeks before you would like to harvest your vermicompost, add a 1/8 to 1/4 inch screen on top of the bedding and continue to feed the worms on top of the screen. After three weeks, a couple of inches of material and the majority of worms will be on top of the screen. Dump out what is left in the bin and sort through it to put any worms back in the bin. The vermicompost is now ready to use in your garden.
Recommendations for Proper Mowing

Mowing is necessary for a quality turfgrass. Mow frequently and at the proper height. The frequency and height of cut depend on the type of turf grass, fertilization program, and the amount of rainfall. The frequency of mowing depends on the growth rate of the turfgrass. The best rule of thumb is to mow enough that you never remove more than one-third of the leaf area per mowing. A common mistake is to allow the turf to become overgrown before mowing; this stresses the grass by removing too much of the foliage at one time.

When you mow turfgrass properly, it is not necessary to remove clippings for the health of the lawn. The only time you need to remove clippings for the grass’ sake is when they are so heavy that the uncut grass is not visible; then remove the clippings to allow the sun to hit the grass. Clippings are an excellent source of slow-release nutrients to the turf. If you remove clippings for aesthetic purposes, consider placing them in a compost pile rather than the trash.

**Mow Height Recommendations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turfgrass</th>
<th>Inches</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bermudagrass</td>
<td>1/2 to 1 1/2</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Augustinegrass</td>
<td>2 1/2 to 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centipedegrass</td>
<td>1 1/2 to 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoysiagrass</td>
<td>1 to 1 1/2</td>
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General Rules for Mowing Turf

1. Be sure the mower blade is sharp. This prevents damage to the turfgrass. Tearing the grass from dull blades can increase disease pressure and loss of water.

2. Don’t let lawn grasses become overgrown before mowing. Avoid removing more than one-third of the leaf area.

3. Before mowing, always walk over the lawn area in search of rocks, wire, and other debris that could be a hazard to the operator or bystanders.

4. Wear safety equipment recommended by the manufacturer of your mowing equipment.

5. Always check the oil level before starting the engine.

6. Always adjust the mowing height of the equipment before starting the engine.

7. In general, mow coarse-textured grasses higher than finer-textured grasses.

8. Mow grasses grown in the shade one-half inch higher than the recommended cutting heights.

9. Grass clippings make excellent additions to the compost pile.

10. Avoid using grass clippings as a mulch, since the grass seed and weed seed may contaminate the planting area.
Herb Gardening

Once any danger of frost has passed (we never know this year), you can start planting your herb garden. A few things to think about when planting: most need full sun, all need well-drained soil (herbs DO NOT like wet feet), and provide good air circulation. Herbs can be used for cooking, fragrance, landscaping, medicinal purposes (if you are taking other medications, contact your doctor before using herbs or herbal supplements), and for crafts and decoration. Some good herbs for Mississippi gardens include: mint, basil, nasturtium, catnip, chives, dill, garlic, thyme, parsley, and sage. Rosemary will grow best in a pot or in an area with WELL-DRAINED soil.

A proper nutritional balance is important for proper growth. Get a soil test before fertilizing. Overfertilization causes succulent, or weak, growth. Succulent growth dilutes the concentration of essential oils, thus limiting the flavor and aroma of the herbs. On the other hand, inadequate fertilization will limit growth, resulting in stunted and weak plants. Base your fertilizer on the soil test recommendations. If you did not do a soil test, apply a complete, slow-release fertilizer with a 1-2-2 or 1-2-1 ratio of N, P, and K in the spring and again in mid to late summer.

Mulching
Mulch with pine bark, straw, or wood chips, being careful not to pile the mulch around the stem base.

Pruning
Tender herbs should be pruned to remove dead tissue in early spring before growth begins. Herbs valued for their young foliage should be pruned regularly during the growing season to encourage fresh, young growth.

Harvesting
To obtain foliage with the maximum amount of oil, harvest in the early morning, after the dew has dried. If this is not convenient, harvesting may be done anytime. To allow adequate time for regrowth of perennial herbs, do not harvest rigorously after late summer.
Harmful Garden Insects

Southern Green Stinkbug

Leaf-footed Bug

Baby Leaf-footed Bugs

Aphids

Cutworm

Leaf Miner

Leaf Miner Damage

Whiteflies

Armyworm

Squash Vine Borer

Tobacco Hornworm

Spider Mites

Squash Vine Borer Larva