



American Beautyberry

One of the most overlooked plants to consider adding to your landscape is the American Beautyberry, *Callicarpa americana*. The American Beautyberry is native to the Southeastern United States and found extensively here in south Mississippi. It is a moderate-to-large-size native perennial shrub found in forested areas but are grown as specimen plants in the landscape.



While sometimes considered an understory plant, American beautyberry needs full sun or part shade to thrive. It is adapted to many soils and can thrive in moist and drier areas but prefers acidic soils. The lime green opposite-leaved foliage provides an excellent contrast to the vibrant fruit that surrounds the stem at leaf nodes. The late summer onset of fruit provides a wonderful fall color.



The fruit is often deep purple but available in a variety of attractive colors of white, pink, burgundy and more. While astringent and not flavorful raw, the berries can be made into jellies, jams, and wines, tasting similar to grape jelly when processed. Plants may show up as volunteers because birds love the large clusters of berries and help to spread the seed. As a result, these are the perfect plants for someone interested in attracting wildlife to the landscape.

One of the many benefits of American Beautyberry is it's a very low-maintenance landscape plant, only needing light thinning, if desired, to prevent a leggy appearance and provide a more uniform shape. Sheering will remove flowers and fruit. Overgrown plants can be reset pruned but, they're easy to propagate by cuttings and seed. Try planting many together to create an attractive native screen or hedge. Next time you're trying to find an attractive shrub that provides many benefits, consider an American Beautyberry.

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Chard, Broccoli, & Kale Thrive in Winter Gardens

Some of the best vegetables you can grow here in the South don't mind a little chill.

When the heat finally fades, our gardens enter a season of vibrant greens, crisp harvests and some truly beautiful foliage. In Mississippi, these crops can be grown not only through fall and winter, but well into spring.

Three of my favorite cool-season vegetables that will keep your beds productive through the cooler months are Swiss chard, broccoli and kale.

If you're looking for vegetables that are both beautiful and delicious, Swiss chard should be at the top of your list.

This leafy green may be one of the most eye-catching plants you can grow. Its stems come in vivid shades of red, yellow and orange, creating a splash of color that rivals flowering ornamentals.

Swiss chard thrives in temperatures between 40 and 75 degrees. This makes it ideal for our fall, winter and spring gardens. Mature plants can handle temperatures down to the upper 20s, especially with a layer of mulch or light frost cloth.

I plant my chard in full sun, although it can tolerate light afternoon shade in warm areas. Chard prefers well-draining soil rich in organic matter with a pH between 6.0–7.0. Work compost into the bed before planting, and water regularly, keeping the soil consistently moist but not soggy.

Chard is a "cut-and-come-again" crop. Harvest the outer leaves and let the center continue to produce new growth for steady harvests all season long.

Broccoli is a tried-and-true favorite that shines in cool weather.

It needs cooler temperatures -- ideally 55 to 70 degrees -- to form those firm, compact heads we love. Broccoli prefers nutrient-rich soil with plenty of organic matter. Before planting, I mix in compost and a balanced, slow-release fertilizer to support strong growth.

Keep the soil slightly moist, especially during dry winter spells, because broccoli has shallow roots that dry out quickly. Mulch helps regulate soil temperature and holds moisture.

Most broccoli varieties are cold hardy down to the mid-20s once established. Young plants benefit from protection during early frosts, but mature plants tolerate chilly nights very well.

After harvesting the main head, many broccoli varieties will continue producing smaller side shoots, providing a bonus harvest for several weeks.

No list of cool-season vegetables is complete without kale.

This leafy green is one of the most cold-tolerant vegetables you can grow. A light frost can actually enhance its flavor, giving the leaves a sweeter, richer taste.

Kale brings bold texture to the garden with its ruffled or curly foliage, and its productivity makes it hard to beat. For best growth, plant kale where it gets at least six hours of full sun a day, but it also performs well in partial shade.

It prefers well-draining, fertile soil with a pH between 6.0–7.5. Regular watering helps keep the leaves tender, but kale is more drought-forgiving than many other leafy greens.

Cold hardiness varies slightly by variety, but most kale tolerates temperatures down to the low 20s. Many varieties can handle even colder weather with protection. Siberian- and Russian-type kale tend to be especially hardy.

With thoughtful care and attention to their growing requirements, these cool-season vegetables will reward you with fresh, homegrown produce and colorful, textural interest through the cooler months.



Garden Calendar: February



Planning

- Decide on plants you would like to have in your spring garden and flower beds.
- Consider buying new plants that you have not tried before.
- Determine how many seed packets you need. Remember to order extra seed if you are planning to replant for a second crop of flowers after the heat of the summer.

Planting

- Plant cold weather annuals: Nasturtiums, Pansies, Snapdragons, English Daisies, Sweet William, and Calendulas
- Start cold weather vegetables in cold frame: Broccoli, Cauliflower, Onion sets, English Peas, Kale, Carrots, Collards, Beets, Radishes, Kohlrabi, and Chinese Cabbage.
- Plant Asparagus in prepared beds.
- Start seeds of Herbs indoors for transplant outdoors.
- February is an ideal time to set out Dogwoods. Planting site should be well drained and plants should be planted shallowly. Dogwoods prefer acidic soil.
- Broad-leaved Evergreens such as Magnolia, Holly, and Photinia can be set out at this time.
- Plant new Roses, or move old Roses soon after February 15.

Fertilizing

- Roses -- Apply top-dressing of organic fertilizer under thick layer of compost or rotted manure.
- Fertilize Trees and Shrubs (not spring Flowering Shrubs) if not fertilized in January.

Pest Control

- Spray garden with dormant spray. This will kill many eggs and spores of insects and diseases. Do not apply if temperatures will dip below freezing within 4 hours of application.

Pruning

- Prune Evergreens for size and shape. Cut out dead wood of Flowering Shrubs. Dispose of clippings to prevent disease or insect spread.
- Prune Hydrangeas during the last week in the month.

In Bloom

- Crocus, early Daffodils, Helleborus, Hyacinth, Pansies, Scilla, Snowdrop, Snowflake, Violet, Camellia, Forsythia, Flowering Quince, Loropetalum, Pussy Willow, Thumbergia Spirea, and Winter Jasmine.





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Blackberries

Late February to early March is the perfect time to plant blackberries. Blackberries grow best in areas of full sun and well-drained soil. They prefer soil with 6.0-6.5 pH levels and high organic matter. Sandy loam or loam soils are best as they cannot tolerate wet soil beds. If your soil is not ideal, raised beds and containers are great for growing blackberries!

When planting blackberries, space plants 2 feet apart with rows 10-12 feet from a hedgerow. Fertilize with 10-10-10 or 13-13-13 one month after planting and again in late June (using 5.5 pounds per 100 feet of row in a 2-foot band.) Increase the fertilizer rate the next year to 11.5 pounds per 100 feet of row applied in February and 5.5 pounds per 100 feet in June. Spread the fertilizer evenly over a 2-foot band. In following years, use 11 pounds of fertilizer per 100 feet in March and 5.5 pounds of fertilizer per 100 feet of row immediately after harvest, evenly applied over a 3-foot band.

Rosette or double blossom is a fungal disease that can limit blackberry production. Thorny cultivars are not immune to this disease, but thornless cultivars do have some tolerance. One way to help control this disease is to eradicate any wild blackberries nearby and spray any diseased blackberries. Other pests and abiotic issues include spotted wing drosophila fruit fly, cane borers, drosophila fruit fly, and white drupelet disorder.

Blackberries ripen in late May and early June. Each of the recommended cultivars listed below can produce $\frac{1}{2}$ - $2\frac{1}{2}$ gallons per plant or 2-3 tons per acre. Blackberries need to be fully ripe when harvested; they do not ripen after harvest. Most cultivars will produce fruit for 2-4 weeks. Do not let harvested berries sit in full sun; refrigerate blackberries as soon as possible after harvest.

Thornless cultivars:

Apache
Arapaho
Caddo
Navaho
Natchez
Osage
Ouachita
Ponca
Sweetie Pie
Triple Crown
Primocane Fruiting Cultivars

Thorny cultivars:

Chickasaw
Kiowa





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Planning & Prepping for Warm-Season Food Plots

As we near the end of deer season, now is a great time to start planning and preparing for spring/summer food plot planting. Warm-season food plots are beneficial for wildlife, especially deer, as they provide a nutritional boost after winter stress, supporting antler growth in bucks, milk production for does, and better fawn recruitment by filling nutritional gaps when natural forage is scarce. In addition to helping wildlife recover from winter, warm-season food plots can offer better forages than natural options and can also serve as strutting grounds for turkeys and attract other game.

When planning your food plot, some thought should be given to site selection with the primary consideration being soil productivity. When evaluating sites for productivity, the following criteria should be considered: nutrient levels, moisture, drainage and soil texture, sunlight exposure, accessibility, size and shape. Test the soil to identify pH and nutrient levels in the soil. Apply lime, if needed, at the recommended rates per the soil test. This should be done several months before planting since changes in pH occur over time.

Soil test results provide fertilization recommendations based on the intended forage species to be planted. It's a good idea to identify the fertilizer suppliers in your area and find out what types of fertilizer products they sell. Not all suppliers carry the same formulations or custom mix fertilizers so you may need to utilize a combination of products to meet the N-P-K requirements for the desired forage species. If you need assistance reach out to your county extension agent for assistance.

Follow suggested planting dates that correspond with the forage selection you choose. Below is a chart with several of the warm-season forages adapted to the southeast which includes varieties and planting dates.

Crop	Forage Class ¹	Cultivar/Variety	Planting Dates
Warm-Season Forages			
Alyceclover	L/A	Common	April 15–June 15
American Jointvetch ⁶	L/A	Americana, Glenn, Lee	April 15–June 15
Buckwheat	F/A	Common, Mancan, Manor, Royal	April 15–June 15
Corn ⁷	G/A	Commercial varieties, Dwarf Tropical	April 1–May 15
Cowpeas	L/A	Iron & Clay, Red Ripper, Whippoorwill	April 15–June 15
Grain Sorghum ⁷	G/A	Kafir, Hegari, Dwarf Milo, commercial varieties	April 15–June 15
Lab Lab	L/A	Rongai, Big Buck, Endurance	April 15–June 15
Soybeans	L/A	Commercial varieties for grain production, Tyrone, Hutcheson	April 15–June 15
Soybeans, Wildlife	L/A	Eagle Claw, Big Fellow, Game Changer, Quail Haven	April 15–June 15
Sunflower ⁸	F/A	Commercial black oil hybrids, Peredovik (120-day maturity)	April 15–June 1

¹Forage classes: A = Annual; F = Forb; G = Grass; L = Legume; P = Perennial

Closed tree canopies make walking through the woods more accessible but can limit undergrowth. Managing native browse, such as briars and hardwood regeneration areas to provide crucial winter cover and food. Another strategy to provide wildlife with as much high-quality forage as possible is to manage winter plots late in the season by mowing or clipping to encourage forages to maintain a palatable and vegetative state as long as possible.



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Low-Maintenance Landscapes

Maintaining a beautiful landscape doesn't have to mean endless mowing, pruning, and watering. Low-maintenance landscaping uses thoughtful plant selection, design, and management practices to create attractive, resilient spaces that require less time, water, and chemical input. This approach benefits both the gardener and the environment.

The foundation of any low-maintenance landscape is proper planning. A well-designed landscape works with nature. Matching plants to site conditions is an important step in reducing long-term maintenance. Before planting, evaluate your site carefully. Areas that stay wet after rain, receive intense afternoon sun, or have compacted soil each require specific plant types. Grouping plants with similar water and light needs allows for more efficient irrigation and reduces stress on plants.



Plant selection determines much of a landscape's upkeep. Native and well-adapted species are ideal choices for low-maintenance designs. Because they evolved under local conditions, native plants generally resist local pests and diseases and thrive without excessive fertilizer or watering. Avoid high-maintenance species that require frequent pruning or specialized care. Reducing lawn space with groundcovers, native grasses, or mixed planting beds can reduce mowing and chemical use.

Use water efficiently. Drip irrigation systems or soaker hoses deliver water directly to roots, reducing evaporation and runoff. Watering deeply but infrequently encourages deep root systems and greater drought tolerance. A 2- to 3-inch layer of organic mulch, such as pine needles, bark chips, or composted leaves, helps regulate soil temperature, suppress weeds, and conserve moisture. As mulch breaks down, it also adds organic matter, feeding beneficial soil organisms that improve soil structure.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques can further minimize chemical use. Instead of routine spraying, gardeners monitor for pests, encourage natural predators, and intervene only when damage exceeds acceptable levels. Diverse plantings support more beneficial insects and reduce pest outbreaks compared to monocultures. This balanced approach protects pollinators and soil health.



Fringe Tree, a Mississippi Native

While low-maintenance landscapes need occasional care, strategic choices can be made to make it minimal: mowing less frequently, fertilizing only when needed, and selective pruning are simple, but effective ways to reduce inputs. And by selecting the right plants, designing for site conditions, and reducing chemical and water inputs, homeowners can enjoy landscapes that are both beautiful and sustainable. The result is more time to enjoy the outdoors and less time maintaining it. For more information refer to Publication 2698, *Home Landscape Design* or visit <https://extension.msstate.edu/lawn-and-garden/landscape-architecture/smart-landscapes>.



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Pawpaw Tree—a Mississippi Native

With Arbor Day events looming, the pawpaw tree, *Asimina triloba*, is one of the most sought-after trees being given away, though many were not familiar with it. The pawpaw tree is a fruit tree native to the Eastern United States. It produces cylindrical fruits with green skin and a pale yellow flesh that some say tastes like creamy banana and pineapple.

While pawpaws grow naturally as an understory tree, make sure to plant yours in partial to full sun as sun is required for fruit production. However, if you have a tree less than 1 ½ feet tall, protect it from the sun for the first year as the young tree is sensitive to sunlight. They should be planted while dormant in the early spring, preferably in well-drained, deep, fertile soil.

Pawpaws thrive in slightly acidic soil down to a pH of 5.5 and will need plenty of water, especially during the first year of establishment. Expect seedlings to produce fruit in 7-8 years and grafted trees to produce in 3-4 years. Make sure to plant more than one seedling or cultivar as crosspollination is required for fruit set. Pawpaw trees bloom in mid-spring before the trees leaf out and can reach up to two inches in diameter. The flowers are rarely visited by bees and are instead pollinated by flies and beetles. Pollinating by hand is labor-intensive but can also greatly increase the amount of fruit produced.

Pawpaw fruit is rich with a custard consistency, very nutritious, and best eaten fresh when fully ripe. Tree-ripened fruit will usually last from 3-5 days at room temperature. Pawpaws can also be used in recipes as a substitute for banana. The seeds within the center of the fruit should not be eaten.

Due to short shelf life, you likely won't see pawpaws in the grocery store. To get a taste of the fruit, plant a few in your garden or make friends with someone who already has a couple trees. Even if the pawpaw ends up not being to your taste, it is a beautiful native tree that will add texture to your garden.





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Good Sanitation to Prevent Disease in Plants

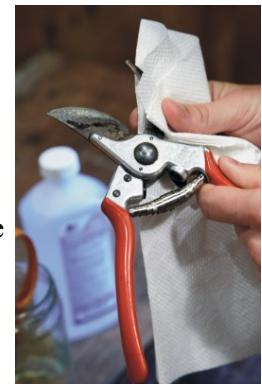
Plant diseases can negatively impact both the appearance of ornamental plants and the productivity of vegetables. The backbone of a good disease management strategy for the home landscape is sanitation. The goal of sanitation is to eliminate or reduce the amount of potential disease by removing inoculum (fungal spores and bacteria). Sanitation can include any activities aimed at preventing the spread of inoculum to healthy plants.

Many disease organisms overwinter on plant debris such as fallen leaves. If this debris is left in the garden area, spring rains result in the spread of the pathogen to healthy plants. Wind and rain will move the disease to other areas of the garden or landscape. Removal of this debris is an important part of a disease control plan, especially for diseases such as rusts, powdery mildew, and bud and flower blights.

In many cases, burying plant residue with soil helps break down the plant material and destroys some pathogens. In addition, pruning out diseased branches can prevent spread onto healthy tissue. In perennial beds, old flower heads, stalks and any diseased plant parts should be removed. Examine shrubs and trees for dead branches. If dead areas are the result of canker disease, their removal will prevent later spread of the disease. When cutting away a diseased branch, the pruning cut should be made 4 to 6 inches below the diseased area. Remember to properly disinfect tools between cuts. Using at least 70% isopropyl alcohol is an effecting way to disinfect pruning tools.

If a plant was infected by leaf spot, raking and disposal of fallen leaves will help minimize the problem. Diseased plant tissue should not be added to compost piles as some organisms can survive in the soil and will spread when the compost is added to the garden area.

Good sanitation practices can dramatically reduce the incidence of disease in the home landscape, as well as reduce the need for pesticide applications throughout the year.



*Bluegrass - Weavers - Spinners - Quilters - Leftie and Poncho! - Sugary Sweet Homestead - Kennedy Engines & Old Mills - Native American Storytelling & Games
Bladesmiths - Coast Candle Co. - Pine Needle Baskets - Plant Dyes - Try your hand at the forge - Blacksmiths - Cattleman Bob Rouse - Carver Culture Ctr - Coppersmiths
Soma Remedies - Woodcrafts - Babydoll Sheep - Pineywood Cloggers 1 pm - Old Standard Craftsmanship - Kickin' Lickin' BBQ - Scooter's Kitchen - MamaNita's*



Forge Day and Heritage Festival

Saturday – Feb. 7, 2026 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.



The Crosby Arboretum - 370 Ridge Road - Picayune - 601-799-2311 ext. 0

Members Free / Adults \$5 / Seniors, Veterans \$4 / Children 12 and under \$2

Mississippi State University is an equal opportunity institution. For disability accommodation, please contact Barb Medlock at 601-799-2311 ext. 0 or barb.medlock@msstate.edu.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

DATE	EVENT
Feb. 7th	<p style="text-align: center;">Crosby Arboretum's Forge Day/Heritage Festival</p> <p>10:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m. This event celebrates the pioneer skills that were once vital to the survival of earlier generations of Piney Woods people and thankfully are being carried on by the quality craftspersons, artisans, and artists who are joining us for this event. Attendees will enjoy the exhibits and demonstrations of traditional skills such as basketmaking, spinning, weaving, quilting, music, dance, storytelling, and more!</p> <p>Event admission for nonmembers is \$5 for adults, \$2 for children 12 and under, and \$4 for seniors, first responders and military members. Members are FREE (please show your membership card).</p>
Feb. 14th	<p style="text-align: center;">Crosby Arboretum's Arbor Day Plant Sale</p> <p>10:00 a.m.—Noon (Members enter at 9:00 a.m.). Choose from a variety of species for your early planting projects. Pearl River County Master Gardeners and other experts will be on hand to help you select the right plant for the right place on your property. Use the Arboretum Service Entrance and follow signage. Sale will take place on our loop drive behind our Visitor Center.</p> <p>Free admission to the Plant Sale.</p>
Feb. 19th	<p style="text-align: center;">Crosby Arboretum's Third Thursday Gardeners Guide Series: Marvelous Mushrooms!</p> <p>10:30 a.m.—Noon. Come learn about the wonderful world of mushrooms with our special guest, Nicholas Gipson, of Down Home Mushrooms! Grow kits and mushroom products will be available for purchase. Check out their website for more details about their products!</p> <p>FREE to members/ \$5 non-members</p> <p>*To register for this and other events at the Crosby Arboretum, visit http://www.crosbyarboretum.msstate.edu/events-page</p>
Feb. 24th	<p style="text-align: center;">Private Applicator Certification Training—Forrest County</p> <p>8:30 a.m. Jessie Tisdale with Forrest County Extension will host a Private Applicator Certification Training at the Forrest County Extension office. Register by February 19th to reserve your seat. This training is for those who own or rent land for agricultural purposes. Must be at least 18 years old. See flyer for details.</p> <p>\$60 per individual.</p>
Feb. 24th & 25th	<p style="text-align: center;">Private Applicator Certification Training—George County</p> <p>9:00 a.m. (24th) AND 1:00 p.m. (25th). Heath Steede with George County Extension will host two certification trainings (you only need to attend one) at the George County Extension office in Lucedale. Space is limited so please reserve your seat by calling 601-947-4223. This training is for those who own or rent land for agricultural purposes. Must be at least 18 years old. See flyer for details.</p> <p>\$60 per individual.</p>
March	<p style="text-align: center;">Grafting Workshop</p> <p>Heath Steede with George County Extension will host a grafting workshop in March. If you are interested in attending and need more information, please call 601-947-4223. MSU-ES George County. There will be a small cost for plants and supplies. Class limit is 30.</p>

2026 Private Pesticide Applicator Certification Class

9:00 am on February 24

1:00 pm on February 25

(You should only attend one session)

Cost is \$60.00

(Check or money order)

**Mississippi State Extension Service
George County Office**

7128 Hwy 198 E Lucedale, MS

(The old First State Bank Office at Multi Mart)

Space is limited.

To reserve your seat please call 601-947-4223.

Heath Steede MSU-Extension George County Coordinator

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PRIVATE APPLICATOR TRAINING

**TUESDAY
FEBRUARY 24TH
8:30 AM**

Forrest County
Extension Office
952 Sullivan Drive
Hattiesburg, MS 39401

Call our office
to register:
601-545-6083

\$60

Register by
February 19th to
reserve your
seat!

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