MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™ EXTENSION

County Gardeners Extension Express

MULTI COUNTY

MARCH 2026, VOLUME 19 ISSUE 3

Ajuga

Ajuga (*Ajuga reptans*), also known as carpet bugle, bugleweed, or carpet bugleweed, is a low-growing, perennial, evergreen groundcover that produces six-inch-tall spikes of small blue flowers that are produced in spring to early summer and are especially attractive when plants are massed together.

This low-growing groundcover produces a layer of dark green to bronze- or purple-colored leaves in a flat rosette, spreading fairly quickly by runners or stolons. The low-growing habit and small leaves of the bugleweed cover the ground in a thick, lush layer of green, perfect for filling in among other plants in the landscape. There are selections with foliage variegated in green, white, red, yellow, and pink.

The mass of green works well with different flower colors, but bright and light colors will show the best compared to the dark green and purple-colored foliage. Simple small or medium size flowers will contrast with the tiny foliage without adding too much detail. Colors in the variegated foliage varieties are primarily warm colors, contrasting flowers would include blues and purples or a simple color palette can be used by repeating the same warm colors with yellow, pink, or red flowers in companion plants.

Available cultivars include: 'Multicoloris,' leaves mottled red, white, and yellow on green; 'Alba,' white flowers; 'Atropurpurea,' bronze foliage and blue flowers; 'Burgundy Glow,' new leaves bright burgundy-red, mature leaves cream/white and dark pink; 'Rubra,' rose flowers, more vigorous; 'Variegata,' grey-green leaves with cream markings.

Ajuga should be planted on 6- to 12-inch centers in well-drained soil for quick establishment. It has moderate drought tolerance and prefers part shade/part sun but does well in the shade.

Ajuga is native to Asia, Africa, and Europe. It isn't always recommended in the landscape because it can be invasive. But, if you find that location where a grass– or vine-type groundcover isn't what you want, give Ajuga a try.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Forrest County
Phone: (601) 545-6083
Email: jnt207@msstate.edu

George County
Phone: (601) 947-4223
Email: h.steede@msstate.edu

Greene County
Phone: (601) 394-2702
Email: mm3583@msstate.edu

Hancock County
Phone:(228) 467-5456
Email: np615@msstate.edu

Harrison County
Phone: (228) 865-4227
Email: tim.ray@msstate.edu

Jackson County
Phone: (228) 769-3047
Email: sls534@msstate.edu

Lamar County
Phone : (601) 794-3910
Email: rosso@msstate.edu

Marion County
Phone: (601) 736-8251
Email: alex.shook@msstate.edu

Pearl River County
Phone: (601) 403-2280
Email: eddie.smith@msstate.edu

Perry County
Phone: (601) 964-3668
Email: b.odum@msstate.edu

Stone County
Phone: (601) 928-5286
Email: hbj4@msstate.edu

Wayne County
Phone: (601) 735-2243
Email: crj29@msstate.edu

Tim Ray, C.A., Co. Coordinator & Extension Agent
MSU-ES Harrison County
Phone: (228) 865-4227 E-mail: tim.ray@msstate.edu

Eddie Smith, Ph.D., C.A., Co. Coordinator & Extension Agent
MSU-ES Pearl River County
Phone: (601) 403-2280 E-mail: eddie.smith@msstate.edu

Planting Irish Potatoes

Most homegrown Irish potatoes are planted in spring, largely because quality seed potatoes are difficult to find for fall planting. Potatoes are somewhat unique among vegetables in that they perform well in mildly acidic soils. In fact, a soil pH below 6.0 is beneficial because it helps suppress potato scab, a common disease.

Before planting, prepare your garden by forming raised rows or high beds to ensure good drainage. Seed potatoes may be small whole tubers or pieces cut from larger ones. Always use certified seed potatoes that are firm and healthy, with no shriveling or dark discoloration inside when cut. Avoid using leftover potatoes from last year's crop, as they may harbor diseases that reduce yields. Grocery store potatoes should also be avoided since they may be treated to prevent sprouting and may not be adapted to local growing conditions.

Large seed potatoes should be cut into pieces weighing about 1½ to 2 ounces, each containing at least one eye. Pieces that are too small tend to produce weak plants, while overly large pieces waste planting material. Cut seed potatoes several days before planting and allow them to cure at room temperature in a single layer. This healing process dries the cut surfaces and reduces the risk of seed piece rot after planting. Plan on using about 1 pound of seed potatoes for every 10 feet of row, or 10 pounds for 100 feet. Space seed pieces 10 to 12 inches apart and cover them with 3 to 4 inches of soil.

Spring-planted potatoes usually bloom, and some flowers may form small green fruits that resemble cherry tomatoes. These fruits, along with green areas on potato skins and sprouted eyes, contain a toxic compound and should never be eaten. To prevent greening, keep developing tubers well covered with soil during the growing season and store harvested potatoes in darkness.

Some gardeners choose to grow potatoes using straw mulch. This method produces clean tubers and makes harvesting easy. Plant seed pieces under about 1 inch of soil, and once sprouts emerge, surround plants with 4 to 5 inches of straw. Maintain a thick, slightly moist mulch layer throughout the season. When the vines die back, potatoes can be harvested simply by pulling away the straw.

Common problems with Irish potatoes include seed piece rot caused by planting in heavy, wet soils; enlarged lenticels and tuber rot resulting from excessive moisture near harvest; early blight; and insect pests such as Colorado potato beetles and aphids.

Garden Calendar: March

Planting

- Plant new roses.
- Broad-leaved Evergreens such as Magnolia and Holly can be set out at this time.
- Plant cold weather annuals: Sweet William, English Daisies, Pansies, and Calendulas.
- Divide Mondo Grass and Liriope. Divide Cannas, Chrysanthemums, Coreopsis, Phlox, and Obedient Plant.
- Start seeds for Tomatoes, Bell Peppers, and Eggplant. Set out Thyme, Lemon Balm, Oregeno, Chives, Sage, and Winter Savory.
- Sow seeds of Johnny Jump-ups, Sweet Peas, Larkspur, Forget-me-nots, and Baby Blue Eyes.
- Flowering shrubs may be moved at this time. Larger shrubs should be moved with a ball of dirt and smaller shrubs may be moved bare-rooted.
- This is the best month to move Crape myrtles.
- Lawns may be sodded at this time. Plant Gladiolus throughout this month for continuous bloom. Plant Hostas.
- Caladiums can be started in outdoor containers as soon as weather warms.

Fertilizing

- Fertilize all the garden except acid-loving plants.
- Topdress Camellias with azalea-camellia fertilizer.
- Lime Peonies, Clematis, and Boxwoods.

Pest Control

- Spray new rose leaves for black spot weekly.

Pruning

- Prune roses at this time. Remove dead and weak canes. Properly dispose of clippings.
- Prune Crape Myrtles and Altheas.
- Prune evergreens for shape and size as early in the month as possible.
- Cut English Ivy back very hard. It will come back very nicely in the spring.
- Trim Mondo Grass and Liriope with lawn mower set on highest setting (6 inches). Dispose of trimmings.

Mulch

- Replenish mulch around Azaleas and Camellias.

Miscellaneous

- Dispose of fallen Camellia blossoms to prevent blight.
- Rake up seed hulls from under bird feeders. They will smother new growth.
- Remove dead flowers from Tulips and Daffodils. Do not cut foliage before it turns yellow and dies.

In Bloom

Bluebells, Chionodoxa, Daffodil, Hyacinth, early Iris, Pansies, Violet, Carolina Jasmine, Azaleas, Camellias, Forsythia, Pearl Bush, Photinia, Flowering Quince, Spirea, flowering fruit trees (Crabapple, Cherry, Pear, and Peach), Oriental Magnolia, and Redbud.

Jessie Tisdale , Extension Agent
MSU-ES Forrest County
Phone: (601) 545-6083 E-mail: jnt207@msstate.edu

Ferns

Mississippi's climate can grow numerous types of ferns. While these perennials do not grow flowers, they have a variety of leaf colors, sizes, and textures that make beautiful plants for landscape gardening.

Ferns are easy to maintain and grow. Shaded areas that are not in afternoon sun are great for ferns. Ideal soil for most fern varieties is loose well-drained organic soil. Some native fern varieties will grow well in poorly drained soil types.

Ferns can be planted in the spring after any danger of winter frost has passed. Before planting, loosen the top four inches of soil and mix in peat moss or well-cured compost. If planting near trees, do not disturb existing tree roots, plant ferns between these roots. To retain soil moisture, cover soil with mulch or a thick layer of leaves. Ferns require little watering or fertilization once they become established in their planted area. Only water ferns during times of extreme drought.

There are a wide variety of ferns that can grow in Mississippi's climate; the following list contains commonly available fern types.

Scientific Name	Common Name
Onoclea Sensibilis	Sensitive or Bead Fern
Hypolepis repens	Flakelet Fern
Woodwardia (Lorinseria) areolata	Netted Chain Fern
Polystichum acrostichoides	Christmas Fern, Dagger Fern
Thelypteris (Macrothelypteris) torresiana	Torres or Mariana Maiden Fern
Osmunda regalis	Royal Fern
Phegopteris (Thelypteris) hexagonoptera	Southern Beech Fern
Microlepia Strigosa	Asian Fern
Dryopteris erythrosora	Autumn Fern
Diplazium esculentum	Vegetable Fern
Athyrium filix-femina	Lady Fern
Athyrium goeringianum (niponicum) "Pictum"	Japanese Silver Painted Fern
Polypodim Polypodioides	Resurrection Fern

Tim Ray, C.A., Co. Coordinator & Extension Agent
MSU-ES Harrison County
Phone: (228) 865-4227 E-mail: tim.ray@msstate.edu

Fringe Tree

If you're looking for a native tree or shrub for the landscape, look no further than the fringe tree. The American Fringe Tree, *Chionanthus virginicus*, is a deciduous, small tree or large shrub that reaches twenty feet in height and twelve feet wide. It is often multiple-trunked with a rounded shrubby form. Once established, the fringe tree has moderate water needs and tolerates both the heat and humidity well.

Throughout much of the year, you may not even take notice of this small tree but, it is one of the earliest of the blooming trees. The fringe tree gets its name from its fragrant, delicate clusters of white petals that hang gracefully. Fringe trees bloom in spring, with white fringe-like petals that have a slight fragrance. Because flowers appear on barren limbs, they seem to appear out of nowhere.

There are two varieties that can be found in the landscape: the American and the Chinese fringe trees. Both trees are stunning in the landscape and are great small-to-medium-sized trees that fit well in urban settings.

As the name suggests, the Chinese fringe tree, *Chionanthus retusus*, tree is native to China, Korea and Japan. It is an easy-to-grow, very hardy tree with beautiful, leathery foliage and unique bark in addition to its showy, white flowers. It makes an excellent foundation tree planting or accent feature in the landscape that grows well in full to partial sun in most any soil type. The tree's lush, shiny leaves transform into a golden hue as autumn sets in. Female trees bear blue-purple fruits from late September to October.

The American fringe tree, also called Grancy greybeard or old man's beard, doesn't quite match the showiness of its Chinese cousin. Its blossoms are a bit more scattered and less consistent compared to the Chinese variety but it makes up for it with its tough nature. It thrives in a variety of soil types and climates making it an excellent choice as a specimen plant in lawns. Whether growing along woodland borders, in urban streetscapes or suburban gardens, the American fringe tree fills its surroundings with grace and beauty.

Both the Chinese and American fringe tree has very few issues. However, under very dry conditions, they can be susceptible to scale insects and borers, including the emerald ash borer, so it's important to give them extra attention during prolonged periods of drought. While both the American and Chinese fringe trees make excellent landscape specimens, the American fringe tree thrives as a flowering tree in native gardens. Consider planting it in clusters along a border to create a striking visual effect.

Ross Overstreet, C.A., Co. Coordinator & Extension Agent
MSU-ES Lamar County
Phone: (601) 794-3910 E-mail: r.overstreet@msstate.edu

Lawn Fertilizers

As the air temperatures start to rise so do the soil temps and some lawns are now beginning to show those first signs of spring green-up. As tempting as it is, we are still a good ways off from needing to apply any lawn fertilizers. If fertilizer is put on too early, it will feed winter weeds and not the turf. A good rule of thumb to follow is to apply fertilizer after you have mowed your turf three times, not necessarily mowing weeds for aesthetic reasons but mowing actual growing turfgrass. It would be a good time to apply a lawn pre -emerge that doesn't include a fertilizer component like Scotts Halts Crabgrass Preventer.

There is typically a 4–6-week delay in root activation after the grass begins to show green growth so applications made at this time aren't being absorbed and used by the plant roots. Typically, this begins in April in the coastal counties and into May moving northward. This is when you should begin to fertilize your lawn. A **soil test is recommended** to determine your soils nutrient levels to ensure application of proper nutrients and only apply what it actually needed. Now is a great time to soil test to know exactly what you need to apply.

Fertilizer analyses are listed on the bag as percentages of Nitrogen, Phosphorous, and Potassium (N-P-K), always in that order. To convert the particular fertilizer product you have available into units of nitrogen, divide the soil sample recommended amount of the nutrient by the percentage of that nutrient found in the product you have available. For example, most applications you will want to apply 1 pound of nitrogen per 1000 ft^2, divide the desired 1 pound by the percentage of that nutrient found in the product, .33 in the case of a 33-0-0 product. (1lb N/.33 N=3 lbs. of actual fertilizer product to equal 1 pound of nitrogen).

Turfgrass	Inches
bermudagrass	½–1½
St. Augustinegrass	2½–3
centipedegrass	1½–2
zoysiagrass	1–1½

Along with fertilizer applications, cutting heights are important for healthy grass. Cutting grasses too short that need to be left tall is a common mistake. Choose an even higher height of cut for grass in shade. Sharpen your mower blade before the season and then shoot for once a month while the turf is actively growing to ensure a quality cut which can help prevent disease and insect damage. Replace that old oil with fresh new and that old, stale gas with fresh before starting your mower this spring. Be sure to dispose of those items properly.

Refer to MS State Extension Publication 1322 *Establish and Manage Your Home Lawn* for more detailed information

Calendar of Upcoming Events

DATE	EVENT
March 3rd	***Agriculture Pesticide Disposal Day*** **8:00 AM—3:00 PM. Forrest County Multipurpose Center parking lot, 962 Sullivan Dr. Hattiesburg. Waste Pesticides Accepted: Insecticides, Herbicides, Fungicides, & Other Pesticide Products. Rinsates & bulk containers are not accepted. Call your local Extension office for more details.**
March 7th	**Crosby Arboretum's Spring Field Walk Through the Arboretum Exhibits: Native Species for your Home Landscape** **9:30—11:00 AM. Join Crosby Arboretum director Pat Drackett on a field walk through the grounds to explore the native plants in our Savanna, Woodland, and Aquatic exhibits. You'll learn tips for their identification and discuss the uses of native plants in your home landscape, including those which are edible or have high wildlife value. Members free; non-members $7.** ***To register for this and other events at the Crosby Arboretum, visit http://www.crosbyarboretum.msstate.edu/events-page**
March 14th	**Crosby Arboretum's Second Saturday Stroll: A Nature Sketchbook Special** **9:30—11:00 AM. Join special guest Robin Veerkamp and learn how to create a simple nature sketchbook. The beauty of the arboretum in Spring will provide the inspiration for our observations and creative documentations in sketchbook form!** **Members $20; non-members $25.**
March 19th	**Practical Knowledge for Home Lawn Management** **1:00—4:00 PM. Tim Ray with Harrison County Extension will host a Lawn Management program on Thursday, March 19th online via Zoom. This program is FREE to the public but registration is required during sign-in.** **To join the program, follow the link https://msstateextension.zoom.us/j/92320105496 or email Tim at tim.ray@msstate.edu to receive the link via email. See flyer for more details.** **Meeting ID: 923 2010 5496**
March 20th—21st	**Crosby Arboretum's Spring Native Plant Sale** **10:00 AM—Noon (Members enter at 9:00 a.m.) Choose from a variety of species for your early planting projects. 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.** **Free admission to the Plant Sale.**
March 21st	**Beginning Beekeepers Short Course** **7:00 AM—5:00 PM. Pearl River County Extension Office hosted by the Pearl River County Beekeepers Assn. Preregistration is requested for adequate supplies & materials by March 13th.** **$10 fee for preregistered individuals, $15 at the event. See flyer for more details.**
March 21st	**Pond Management Workshop** **9:00 AM—Noon. Griffin Tree Farm, 23 Loftin Rd, Colombia. Topics will include Pond Health, Weed Management, & Managing Fish Populations. Call the Marion County Extension office at 601-736-8251 for more information. See flyer for details.**
March 21st	**31st Annual Landscape Symposium** **9:00 AM—3:00 PM. Registration at 8:30 AM. Stone County CTE Building, 1376 Tomcat Trail, Wiggins. The Stone County Master Gardeners will host their annual landscape symposium 'Reflections of Life Through Plants' with guests Peggy Martin, Jim DelPrince, Carolyn Angelo, and others. $20 at the door. See flyer for details.**

AGRICULTURAL PESTICIDE DISPOSAL DAY

Transporting Waste Pesticides for Collection

March 3, 2026 8:00 AM—3:00 PM
Forrest County Multipurpose Center

Before You Load...

Wear protective clothing. At a minimum, wear full-length clothing, chemical resistant gloves, boots, goggles, and a hat. Read the label, if the container has one, for special handling requirements, such as the use of a dust mask.

Check for weak containers. If a container looks weak, repackage it or use a secondary container to prevent leaks or spills during transit.

Handle containers carefully to avoid damaging them or exposing yourself to chemicals. Try not to drag containers over rough surfaces that might tear bags or puncture rigid containers.

Have spill control materials on hand, including a shovel, broom, and oil absorbent or kitty litter. Absorb any spills immediately and put absorbed materials in a heavy-duty garbage bag. You may want to cover the cargo area with a tarp or heavy-duty garbage bags before loading material, to make clean-up easier in the event of a spill.

Before You Haul...

Secure the load using bungee cords or rope, to keep products from shifting, leaking, spilling, or blowing out during transport.

Protect the load from the weather. Take a plastic cover or tarp with you in case it rains.

Get hazardous material placards if you believe your load weighs more than 1,000 pounds. Lighter loads don't need placards. You may want to split the load or use more than one vehicle if your load weighs close to 1,000 pounds.

Drive carefully. Go directly to the collection site. Any spills, damage, or clean-up that occur or are needed during transport are the driver's responsibility.

Remember: It is **your** responsibility to safely transport waste pesticides to the collection site.

The 31st Annual Landscape Symposium

Reflections of Life Through Plants

Saturday March 21, 2026

9:00 until 3:00

registration opens at 8:30

Stone County CTE Building

1376 Tomcat Trail

Wiggins, Ms

Light snacks and lunch included

Early Bird Tickets: $15.00 available at Stone County Extension Office until 3/13/26.

Tickets at door $20.00

Make checks payable: Stone County Master Gardener

214 N Critz St. Wiggins, MS

For more information call 601-928-5286

Special Guests:

* Peggy Martin: A Survival Story
* Dr. Del Prince: Sympathy Arrangements
* Carolyn Angelo: Plant Symbolism in Literature

Panel Discussion

Question and Answer

Presented by:

Stone County Master Gardeners

Home Lawn Management

Practical Knowledge for Better Management Decisions

March 19, 2026

Tim Ray with Harrison County Extension will host a Lawn Management program on Thursday, March 19th from 1:00 PM—4:00 PM online via Zoom. This program is FREE to the public but registration is required during sign-in.

In this program, we will:

- **Learn to identify turfgrass species and it's importance for proper management.**
- **Develop a common sense turf management plan.**
- **Discuss input management (water, fertilizer, etc.) and ways to help decrease those inputs.**
- **Learn the cultural practices and required maintenance for each grass type.**
- **Be familiar with practical pest management (weed, insect, disease) solutions for home lawns.**
- **Develop a simple understanding of pesticide labels as they relate to pests and turf species.**

To join the program, follow the link https://msstateextension.zoom.us/j/92320105496 or email tim.ray@msstate.edu to receive the link via email.

Meeting ID: 923 2010 5496

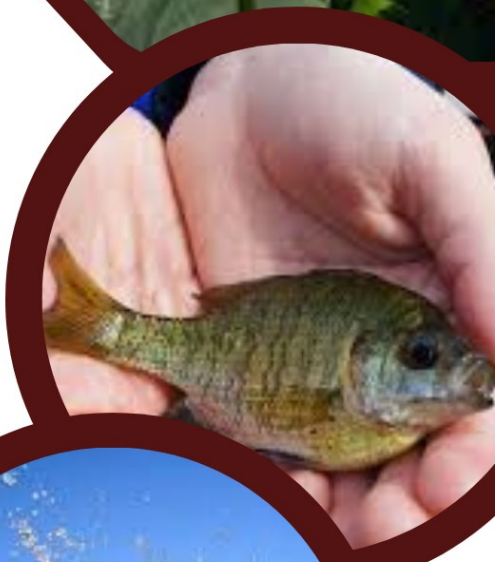
MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

Tel: 228.865.4227

WWW.EXTENSION.MSSTATE.EDU

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Pond Managment Workshop



Saturday March 21, 2026

9:00AM-12:00PM

Griffin Tree Farm
23 Loftin Rd
Columbia, MS 39429

Topics

- Pond Health
- Weed Management
- Managing Fish Populations

Call the Marion County Extension Office with any questions.
(601)736-8251

Beginner Beekeepers Short Course

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

Saturday, March 21, 2026
7:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.
Pearl River County Extension Office
835 Highway 26 West, Poplarville, MS

$10 per person pre-registration fee (make checks payable to Pearl River County Beekeepers Association and put for Beekeeper Short Course on the for line of check) due by Friday, March 13, 2026.
$15 per person registration at the event
Please pre-register so adequate materials and supplies will be available for participants.

Lunch will be on your own.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Everything you need to start beekeeping in a one-day course**
- **Afternoon activities will be in the bee yard! All attendees are encouraged to wear long pants, closed toe shoes or booths and bring a long sleeve shirt.**
- **If you have a bee jacket, feel free to bring it. If not, vails will be availalbe as long as they last.**

----------Cut here----------

Bring or mail this portion of the form with your check or money order by Friday, March 13, 2026, to Pearl River County Extension Office, 835 Highway 26 West, Poplarville, MS 39470.

Name _____

Address _____

_____

Phone Number _____ Email _____