MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™ EXTENSION

County Gardeners Extension Express

MULTI COUNTY

APRIL 2026, VOLUME 19 ISSUE 4

Bloodgood Japanese Maple

The Japanese maple, *Acer palmatum*, is a short tree in the maple family (Sapindaceae). It is native to southeast Korea and central and south Japan where it grows as an understory tree and noted for having many aesthetically pleasing forms. Weeping as well as upright varieties exist, and the species is well noted for its beautiful deep red and orange summer color that deepens into the fall. Acer is Latin for sharp and palmatum means shaped like a hand, referring to the leaves.

Although there are many aesthetically pleasing Japanese maple varieties, the Bloodgood Japanese maple, *Acer palmatum* "Bloodgood" is one of the hardiest varieties. It is a large deciduous shrub or small tree. It gets its name from Bloodgood Nursery on Long Island, New York where it was initially sold prior to World War II. It can grow up to 20 feet tall and wide and has a slow to moderate growth rate. The shape is round, broad, and upright with dense spreading branches. It prefers well-drained acidic soils with good air circulation. You can plant higher or in a raised bed in heavy clay soil for better drainage. It is easy to plant from nursery containers and requires minimum nutrients.

The Bloodgood can tolerate direct sun in northern areas. In southern areas, it prefers partial shade to avoid leaf sun scorch during the hot dry summers, which has been noted on many varieties planted in full sun here on the Coast. It does leaf out early and may be damaged by spring frosts. You can prune in February when it is dormant to alter the shape if desired. Propagation is done through grafting and stem cutting.

This is a popular Japanese maple because the leaves are red throughout the summer except in hot dry areas where they may be greenish red. In addition to the seasonal leaf colors, it provides winter interest with its muscular-looking multi-trunks and layered branching structure.

The Bloodgood can be grown in a container or as a specimen in the ground. Due to its small size, you can plant it along walkways and patios. It can also be used as an understory tree. The roots are noncompetitive, and you can place other plants around it.

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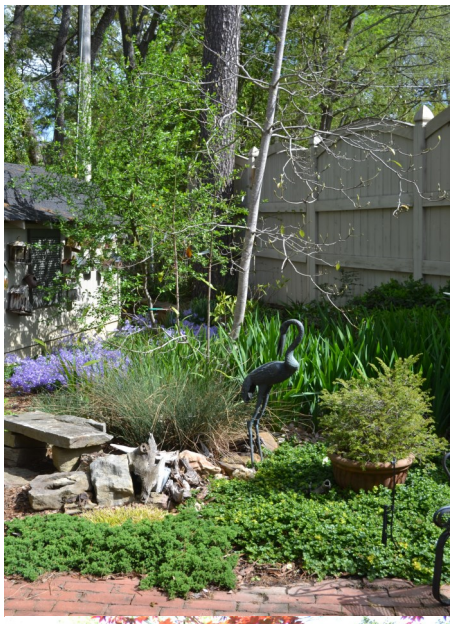
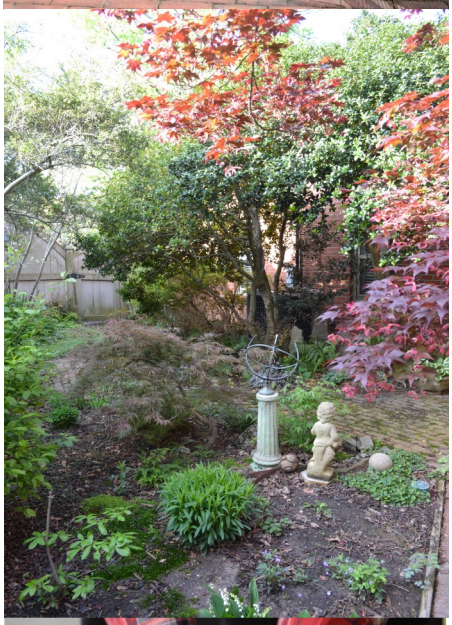
Spring Cleaning

As your perennial plants begin to emerge and actively grow, take a little time to tidy up your beds. Make sure all the dead foliage from last year's perennials and annuals has been removed. Clearing away this old plant material helps fresh growth come in stronger and keeps beds looking neat.



Early spring is also the perfect time to tackle those pesky weeds. Hoeing or hand-pulling them now, before they have a chance to spread, can save you a lot of work later in the season. Once the weeds are gone, you can refresh the mulch in your beds.

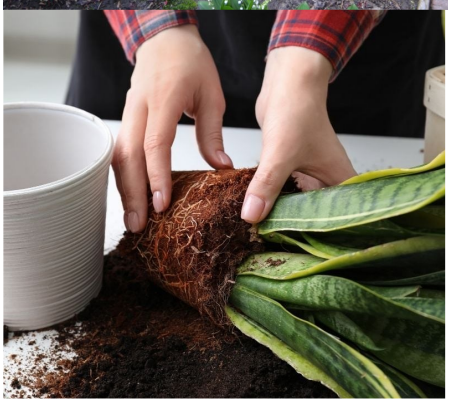
Keep in mind that applying mulch this early can slow down how quickly the soil warms compared to bare soil. And if you enjoy those welcome "volunteer" seedlings that pop up each year to help refill your flower beds, avoid applying mulch too heavily. A thick layer can prevent many of those seedlings from germinating.



Because we experienced a colder winter than usual, some perennials may be a little slow to start growing this spring. You can take advantage of this slower growth period to divide summer and fall bloomers such as hostas, asters, boltonia, and daylilies.

If you brought your tender container plants indoors for the winter, now is also a great time to give them some attention. Start by pruning, repotting, and fertilizing to help them recover from the "winter uglies" and get them ready for the growing season.

So how do you know when it's time to repot? One good clue is seeing roots at the top of the soil or roots growing out of the drainage holes. If you're still unsure, gently slide the root ball out of the pot and take a look. If you notice roots circling tightly around the root ball, it's definitely time for a larger container. When repotting, choose a pot that is about twice the diameter of the old one to give the roots plenty of room to grow.



Spring is a season of renewal in the garden, and a little attention now can set the stage for months of healthy growth and colorful blooms. By cleaning up old foliage, controlling weeds early, refreshing mulch, dividing perennials, and giving your container plants a fresh start, you'll help your landscape transition smoothly into the growing season. Taking care of these simple tasks now will reward you with stronger plants, fuller beds, and a garden that thrives throughout the months ahead.

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, Allysum, 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.

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Is Organic Gardening Right for You?

Let's face it, interest in organic gardening has increased. Much of the interest is directed towards reducing or eliminating the use of conventional pesticides for controlling insects and diseases and/or eliminating the use of synthetic fertilizers. There are now many products in grocery stores labeled organic and people buy them, regardless of their increased price tag. Many claim that eating organically grown foods is much healthier than eating foods produced using conventional methods, although there have been scientific studies contradicting such claims. To the contrary, there have been studies showing no difference in healthiness, taste, and environmental sustainability between the two methods. Regardless, it doesn't matter which method you prefer, it's your choice as an individual, both methods can work, and both methods can be sustainable. But there are trade-offs when it comes to organic-only gardening.

Organic gardening in south Mississippi faces some serious problems with severe insect and disease pressures on vegetable plants. There are many effective conventional insecticides and fungicides but controlling diseases and insects by natural means alone can be difficult. There are several insecticides available including Bt and Spinosad formulations for caterpillar or larval control or pyrethrums for other insects, but disease control is limited. Neem oil, bicarbonate, and copper- and sulfur-based fungicides provide some protection against diseases. The best results for disease management come from selecting resistant varieties, proper timing and spacing during planting, removing dead or diseased plant tissue, using healthy transplants, and watering in the morning. Hand-picking insects, protecting natural predators such as ladybugs and assassin bugs and incorporating insect resistant plants such as chrysanthemums could help with insect control. For all of these reasons, organic gardening is easier on a small scale but, all of these methods will aid in insect and disease management for both methods of gardening.

Organic fertilizers such as manures, compost or bone meal are derived directly from plant or animal sources and usually contain plant nutrients in low concentrations. Many of these nutrients must be converted into inorganic forms by soil bacteria and fungi before plants can use them, so they typically are more slowly released, especially during cold weather. However, there are many benefits. Organic fertilizers improve water movement into the soil and, over time, add structure to the soil. Organics feed beneficial microbes, making the soil easier to work. But they may cost more than inorganic fertilizers and are more difficult to apply because they are less concentrated, supplying fewer nutrients pound for pound. Fresh, non-composted manure can damage your plants because some manure contains harmful amounts of salts and may be a source of weed seeds. If manure from grazing land is used, herbicide residue may harm garden plants. Inorganic fertilizers usually contain only a few nutrients – generally nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, sulfur and sometimes micronutrients, either singly or in combination. These nutrients are in a form readily available to plants and are available in slow-release form. Our soils in Mississippi often do not lack in micronutrients.

Too often the word sustainable is used synonymously with organic gardening while both methods have the potential to be sustainable. Sustainable can be described as the use of a resource in such a way that it does not harm the environment, is economically viable, and is socially responsible. Both methods can incorporate wise water-use practices, add organic matter to improve soil health, etc. But, one must also keep in mind, whether you do organic or conventional gardening, it doesn't mean pesticide free. All the above-mentioned products for insect and disease control are, indeed, chemicals used to control pests and are as safe as the user's ability to apply them correctly. It's the way they are used that can make a difference on the environment. Reading and following label directions, applying no more than recommended, and applying products targeted at specific insect or disease pests are three important components in successful gardening and protecting the environment for generations to come.

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Large Patch Disease of Turf

Large patch, caused by the pathogen *Rhizoctonia solani*, is one of the most common lawn disease in Mississippi during the spring and fall. Typically the times when our warm season grasses are at their weakest. This disease is characterized by circular patches with brown or smoky-gray outer edges. The circular patches may continue to grow to 20 feet or more in diameter and may intersect with other patches, creating complex patterns .

In larger patches, the inside of the patch may begin to turn green again as it starts to recover. The patches often occur at the same location year after year, usually in low areas or where dew or moisture persists for longer periods, such as shaded areas. The patches grow from the center outward and may spread rapidly or slowly, depending on moisture and temperature conditions. The color of the outside edge of an actively growing patch is usually a cinnamon-brown, reddish color.

The fungus begins its attack at the base of leaf sheaths, where the leaves attach to the stolon. The base of the leaves turns dark brown to almost purple and become soft when conditions are moist and the disease is active. In the absence of moisture, the base will turn tan or reddish-brown and harden. Because the base of the leaf is rotting, the flow of moisture and minerals to the upper leaves is cut off, and the top of the leaf changes color before dying and turning brown.

Prevention is the most effective method of disease control. To prevent large patch or other lawn diseases from developing, follow these disease-control procedures:

- Use grass varieties adapted for your area.
- Properly manage your lawn properly by using recommended practices for watering, mowing, fertilizing, and removing thatch.
- Avoid excessive nitrogen fertilizer (water-soluble nitrogen sources), which promotes a lush turf that is easily attacked by many plant diseases, including large patch.
- Avoid watering late in the afternoon or mid-morning, as it allows grass to remain wet for extended periods, encouraging disease development.
- Water infrequently and deeply at times that minimize the leaf wetness period.

Many homeowners fertilize their lawn too early, encouraging large patch disease. Refer to MSU Extension Publication 1322 *Establish and Manage Your Home Lawn* for more guidance on fertility and fertilization. As a general rule, you should not fertilize until you have mowed your warm-season turfgrass lawn at least twice. Early fertilization will feed more weeds than grass and will worsen large patch disease.

Minimize thatch, a buildup of grass and plant debris in the root and crown areas of the turf. Excessive thatch creates a favorable environment for the growth of many disease-causing fungi and an unfavorable environment for turf plants. Thatch gives the lawn a spongy texture. If you can wiggle your finger through more than a half-inch of grass before reaching the soil, you probably have excessive thatch. Thatch is most common in zoysiagrass but can occur in most turf types.

Three active ingredients for residential use are available in garden centers. Two of the active ingredients are members of the same class of chemistry. Myclobutanil and Propiconazole have the potential to burn turf in temperatures higher than 80°F. The safest fungicide are those that include the active ingredient azoxystrobin which are Scotts DiseaseEx and Heritage G.

Samples may be submitted to the MS State Pathology Lab for definitive identification if there is any doubt. There is a $10 fee and please contact to your local County Extension office for best way to collect samples.

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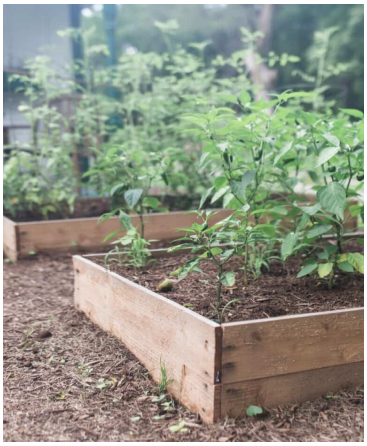
Raised Beds



Raised beds are a great solution for areas with poor soils or little space for traditional gardens. These raised beds should be no larger than 4 feet wide to allow for the gardener to reach the center of the bed from either side.

When choosing a site for your raised bed, areas of full sun are best, but areas that receive at least 6 hours of sunlight will grow most garden vegetables and flowers. Areas that receive morning sunlight are preferred over those that receive afternoon sunlight. Areas that may become waterlogged are not ideal as raised beds need proper drainage. It is also important to make sure the bed is close enough to a water faucet that a hose will reach all areas of the bed.

Using native soil is not recommended for raised beds. Raised bed growing mixes should have high percentages of peat moss, vermiculite, and perlite. These growing mixes are light and well-drained. These soil mixtures can be bought from garden supply stores or made with equal volumes of peat moss, compost, and pine bark.

Estimated Cost to Construct an 8-by-4-by-1-foot bed:

2 × 2 in × 12 in × 12 ft treated lumber boards

$24 each

Price: $48

32 ft^3 growing mix

$20/$yd^3$ (bulk)

Price: $23 (cubic feet: 27 ft^3 /yd^3)

Assorted screws/brackets to secure side boards

Benefits of raised beds:

- Can be used to grow both flowers and vegetables
- Due to improved drainage, research shows that yields are higher than in-ground gardening.
- Entire beds can be cared for as the garden can be reached from both sides
- Soil texture remains loose and airy since the soil is not being walked on.

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Know Your Grass Type for Proper Management

For proper lawn management you need to know what grass type you have. Each one requires different management practices for optimum growth and when it comes to weed control, there are label recommendations for different grass types. Let's look at descriptions of each and, hopefully, you can get an identification for your grass type. But, before we do, there are a couple of terms to be familiar with. **Stolon** – a stolon is a creeping horizontal plant stem or runner growing above ground that takes root at points (nodes) along its length to form new plants; **Rhizome** – a rhizome is a continuously growing horizontal underground stem which puts out lateral shoots and adventitious roots at intervals. Knowing these two terms, in addition to other visual details, can help you determine your grass type.

Centipede (top) and Carpetgrass (bottom). These two grass types are very similar in appearance and one may not realize, if you have centipede, chances are you will also have some Carpetgrass. Both like a low pH, both have the same mowing height, low fertility requirements, etc., however, there are some very distinct differences. Note the "boat-shaped" tip of Centipede compared to the flat tip of Carpetgrass as well as the seed head comparison between Carpetgrass (left) and Centipede (right). Both grass types produce stolons but not rhizomes. It's important to note that while these grasses are similar in many ways, herbicide options are limited with Carpetgrass. Some herbicides, such as Metsulfuron methyl (ex. MSM Turf) will control Carpetgrass but not harm Centipede when used as directed. If you question whether you have Carpetgrass, let the lawn grow enough to produce seed heads.

St. Augustine is the most shade-tolerant of the warm season grasses. It has medium fertility requirements and likes a pH of 6 – 7.5, which is quite the opposite of the more acid-loving Centipede. Like Centipede, it also produces only stolons. Unlike the other grass types, you cannot get St. Augustine seed, only sod, although it will produce a seed head (top right). One thing to note: a distinct feature of St. Augustine is the leaf blade looks like it had a string tied around it and tightened (noted by the arrow). It has poor cold tolerance, so it is not a good turf choice for far north Mississippi.

I'll admit, Zoysia is one of my favorite grass types for a lawn. However, it's expensive and slow to establish but, you can get both sod and seeded varieties. Zoysia has a pointed leaf blade when compared to other grass types and a very distinct seed head (top right). It produces both stolons and rhizomes (bottom left). It has medium to high fertility requirements and moderate shade tolerance.

Bermuda grass isn't as heavily grown for a lawn on the coast as it is in many other places in the South, but you do see it most often on ball fields or parks. These are generally hybrid types developed specifically for athletic fields and …well, lawns. Like other grass types, Bermuda also has a distinct seed head (bottom left and middle). Note the hybrid seed head on the far left compared to the more pronounced common Bermuda in the middle. Bermuda has a high fertility requirement, so it loves nitrogen. It is easy to establish and has a high recovery rate. It produces both stolons and rhizomes Bermuda is the most aggressive of the grass types so high maintenance is required.

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Taking Care of Birds During the Spring

Spring is an active time for birds because many are returning from migration and bird activity is increasing. This makes spring a great time for observing and caring for wild birds. Creating a safe and welcoming environment during the spring season can help us enjoy their natural behaviors and habitats. Some key tips to help keep birds safe and active are listed below:

Provide a variety of food—

Use seeds, fruit, suet or mealworms to meet different birds' dietary needs. Utilizing a cluster of feeders can help provide different varieties of food.

Clean and place feeders properly—

Clean feeders every two weeks to maintain a healthy environment for the birds. Place feeders about 5 feet off the ground and away from structures, branches and predators. Placing feeders near trees or bushes can also give them a place to hide and keep away from predators.

Offer fresh water—

Keep bird baths clean and filled with fresh water for drinking and bathing.

Support nesting—

Spring is the time of year that birds start building their nests. Providing nesting materials such as twigs, grass, etc. is essential for their environment.

Planting flowers and trees—

This attracts birds and improves your chances of observing them.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

DATE	EVENT
April 4th	**Pearl River County Master Gardeners Spring Plant Clinic** **9:00 AM—1:00 PM. Paul Bounds Garden Center. 401 N. Main Street, Picayune.**
April 11th	**Pine Belt Master Gardners Annual Spring Garden Day** **8:30 AM. Forrest County Extension, 952 Sullivan Dr. Hattiesburg. Guest speakers include Mike Keith, 'Water Gardens in Personal Landscapes' and Rick Griffin, "Designing Gardens at the Governor's Mansion & at Home'. This event is free. See flyer for more details.**
April 11th	**Crosby Arboretum's Second Saturday Stroll: Spring Field Walk** **9:30—11:00 AM. Join Crosby Arboretum director Pat Drackett for a field walk through the grounds to explore the beautiful native plants that are in bloom along our pond journey trail and savanna exhibits.** **Members Free; non-members $7.** ***To register for this and other events at the Crosby Arboretum, visit http://www.crosbyarboretum.msstate.edu/events-page**
April 17th	**Organic Vegetable Production Workshop** **8:00 AM—3:00 PM. Truck Crops Branch Experiment Station, 2024 Experiment Station Road, Crystal Springs. The workshop will focus on organic vegetable production practices and will be a great opportunity for small farmers interested in organic systems.** **Preregistration is required ($15). Spots are limited so encourage those interested to register early. See flyer for more details**

Pearl River County

Master Gardeners

Spring Plant Clinic

April 4, 2026

9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m.

Paul Bounds Garden Center

401 N. Main Street

Picayune, MS 39466

Mississippi State University Extension will provide reasonable accommodations to individuals with disabilities and individuals with limited English proficiency. Language access services, such as interpretation and translation of vital information, will be provided free of charge to limited English proficient individuals upon request. Contact your local Extension office prior to a program or event to request reasonable accommodations.

MSU PINE BELT MASTER GARDENERS ANNUAL SPRING GARDEN DAY

SPRING GARDEN REVIVAL

SATURDAY, APRIL 11

Forrest County Extension Center
952 Sullivan Drive, Hattiesburg

FREE ADMISSION & REFRESHMENTS

Begins at 8:30am

PLANT SALES!

GUEST SPEAKERS

- **MIKE KEITH** - *Water Gardens in Personal Landscapes*
- **RICK GRIFFIN** - *Designing Gardens at the Governor's Mansion & at Home*

RAFFLE, SILENT AUCTION, & DOOR PRIZES!!!

Vendors Include:

✓ Southern Cultured Orchards & Nursery (Larry Stephenson),
✓ Mizell's Camellia Hill Nursery,
✓ Plants Grown by PBMG Members, and MORE!

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

Organic Vegetable Production Workshop

FRIDAY **April 17, 2026** **8:00AM**

Preregistration required ($15)

The workshop will have educational sessions on variety selection, nutrient, weed, disease, and insect management, and scientific updates on horticultural practices for vegetable crops.

Location: Truck Crops Branch Experiment Station

Lunch provided

Registration link:
https://reg.extension.msstate.edu/reg/event_page.aspx?ek=0081-0004-9091894bd1d74c82abcff4d22d331706

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