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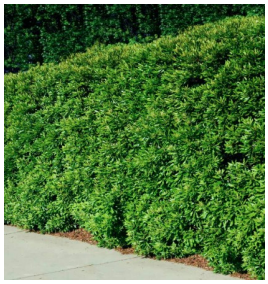
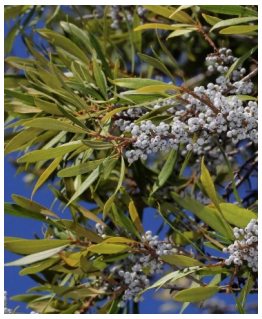
Southern Wax Myrtle

The Southern Wax Myrtle, *Morella cerifera* (syn. *Myrica cerifera*), also known as southern bayberry or candleberry, is a large, spreading, fast-growing, evergreen tree or large shrub that typically grows to 10-15' tall and 8-10' wide, but occasionally reaches a tree-like height of 20' tall or more. It is native to the southeastern U.S. and typically found in a variety of soil types and habitats including wetlands, sand dunes, hillsides, and upland forests.



The wax myrtle is winter hardy to USDA Zones 7-10. It can be a versatile plant in the landscape that can be used in woodland gardens or shrub borders, as a privacy screen or informal hedge, in wet, dry, sun or shady sites. The lower limbs can be trimmed to more resemble a tree than a shrub. It is also tolerant of high winds and salt spray making it a great choice for flood-prone or seaside areas. The wax myrtle fixes atmospheric nitrogen which helps it survive in poor soils.



The glossy, aromatic leaves, particularly the new growth, emit the distinctive bayberry candle fragrance when crushed. Flowers are fragrant but non-showy, with only the flowers on male plants displaying some color. Flowers bloom in late winter to early spring. Pollinated female flowers are followed by small attractive clusters of tiny, globose, blue-gray fruits which mature in late summer to fall, with persistence through winter. Each fruit is surrounded by an aromatic waxy substance. Birds eat the fruits in fall and winter, thus helping the plants to naturalize by disbursing the seed.

This species is dioecious (male and female flowers on separate plants). Female plants are preferred in the landscape because they produce the attractive and sometimes useful fruit. At least one male plant is needed to facilitate pollination of the female flowers.

Wax myrtles are great pollinator trees. Their nectar provides food for honeybees and butterflies, and its dense foliage throughout the year, providing winter cover for wildlife. These trees can grow quickly, so frequent trimming is necessary to maintain a particular height. New growth is evident by a bright green color and is easily broken from the original branches.

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Common Causes of Tomato Wilt

Tomatoes are in almost everyone's garden and would easily be voted the number one vegetable. However, as much as we love to grow tomatoes we must admit that it's not always easy to do; in fact, sometimes it's downright heartbreaking.

One of the heartbreaks of growing tomatoes occurs when our plants wilt. Wilt occurs suddenly or gradually when leaves, shoots or stems droop or collapse. In our part of the world there are six common causes of tomato wilt.

The first two causes of tomato wilt are the most obvious, yet they are very important to mention. They are the lack of or excess water. We all understand why leaves droop or plants die from lack of water; however, tomato plants that stand in water for very long wilt. If soils stay saturated plants will die. This is why we recommend planting in well-drained soil or in raised beds.

A third and prominent cause is a disease known as Bacterial Wilt. Many gardeners describe plants with this disease as looking like they had hot water poured on them. They are fine one day and the next are permanently wilted. Bacteria actually clog the plumbing system of the plant resulting in a virtual drought.

Bacterial Wilt can be diagnosed with a simple test. First, remove the plant from the soil. Rinse the roots and lower stem. Once rinsed, cut a section from the lowest part of the stem, just above the roots, about four inches long. Have a jar of water ready so that the stem section can be suspended in the water, bottom end down. Then, watch the bottom end of the stem for a wispy, cloudy, milky ooze. This is bacterial streaming. The bacterial ooze is almost transparent, but can be seen releasing from the base of the stem.

There isn't much that can be done for Bacterial Wilt except to remove and destroy affected plants. Future plantings should be made in a different location. Tomatoes may be grown in containers, but if roots grow from the bottom of the container into infected soil they may contract the disease. Do not reuse stakes or ties.

Other common causes of tomato wilt include Southern Blight, Fusarium Wilt and Root Knot Nematodes. Nematodes and Fusarium Wilt may be avoided by planting tomato varieties that are resistant to both of these pests. Southern Blight, however, is another one of those "overnight" killers like Bacterial Wilt. It can be recognized by white fungal growth at the soil line or by beige "seed pearl" sized balls of white, beige or brown.

If your plants are wilted, try to determine the reason so that it can be avoided next time. There may yet be a simple solution to keep your love for tomatoes intact.

Garden Calendar: May

Planting

* Plant Crape Myrtles when plants are in color.
* Plant annuals and perennials early in the month and keep well watered.
* Set out Chrysanthemums.
* Continue planting Gladiolus. Can also plant Calla Lilies, Ginger Lilies, Tuberose, and Cannas.
* Take Hydrangea cuttings and let root in coarse sand.
* Plant in shade: Impatiens, Coleus, Sweet Alyssum, Lobelia, and annual Dianthus.
* Plant in the full sun: Verbena, Periwinkle, Ageratum, Marigolds, Zinnas, Petunias, Wax Begonia, Clematis, Four-o'clocks, and Portulaca.
* Plant these Vegetables and Fruits this month: Cucumber, Tomato, Pepper, Squash, Peas, Beans, Eggplant, Corn, Okra, Parsley, Watermelon, and Cantalope.

Pest Control

* Keep an eye on garden pests and diseases: red spiders, thrips, aphids, lacebugs, lacewings, mealy bugs, caterpillars, slugs, snails, mildew, fungus, and crown rot.

Pruning

* This is the last month to prune Azaleas and Camellias as new buds are formed in June.
* Gardenias can be pruned by bringing a bouquet inside to beautify the house.
* Cutting bouquets regularly will keep your plants pruned and prolong the blooming season.
* Cut in early morning or late afternoon and put into water immediately.
* Remove seedpods from bulbs and irises; they sap the plants' strength.

Mulch

* Mulch layer helps maintain moisture and can protect roots from extremes in temperature.

Miscellaneous

* Water deeply during weeks that it does not rain.

Home Accent

* Repot house plants during their active growing period: April through September.
* May is a good month to repot and divide overcrowded ferns.

In Bloom

Confederate Jasmine, Gardenias, Begonias, Impatiens, Salvia, Geraniums, Roses, Hydrangeas, Magnolias, Azaleas, Clematis, Phlox, Sweet William, Deutzia, Honeysuckle, Golden-Rain Tree, Pomegranate, Mock Orange, and Weigela.





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Potato Beetle

Colorado potato beetle, *Leptinotarsa decemlineata*, one of the most damaging pests of potatoes and other solanaceous crops. Potato is the preferred host, but this insect pest also will feed on tomato, eggplant, pepper, tobacco, ground cherry, horsenettle, nightshade, belladonna, thorn apple, henbane, buffalobur and other related plant species. Damage to crops is mainly due to leaf feeding by larvae and adults. Heavy infestations can result in complete defoliation of leaves and other plant tissues.

Adult Colorado potato beetles are yellowish-orange in color with ten black stripes on the wing covers (elytra), which are the modified forewings of beetles. The thorax possesses a pattern of black spots and two short lines near the middle. Adults are approximately 3/8 of an inch in length and oval in shape. The legs are orange in color and punctures on the surface are coarse. Larvae are plump, humpbacked in shape and pinkish-orange to orange in color, with a series of two spots per segment along each side. Eggs are yellow in color when deposited and darken to orange as they develop.

Adults overwinter in the soil and/or under surface litter, becoming active as temperatures increase in the spring. Adults then feed, mate and lay clusters of eggs on the undersides of leaves. Each female may lay 300+ eggs during her lifetime. Eggs hatch in 4-9 days; larvae initially feed on foliage in groups. There are usually 2-3 generations per year.

Effective control requires a combination of cultural, mechanical, and chemical methods.

Starting with non-chemical practices to reduce beetle populations. Gardeners should remove weeds—especially alternate host plants like horsenettle—that can harbor beetles. Using floating row covers can help protect plants by preventing adult beetles from reaching them. In small plantings, hand-picking adults, larvae, and egg masses from the undersides of leaves is a simple but effective method of control.

Regular scouting is critical for successful management. Plants should be inspected frequently, especially when they are young. Look for clusters of the yellow-orange eggs on the undersides of leaves and for feeding damage. Controlling beetles early, particularly in the larval stage, helps prevent severe defoliation and reduces the need for repeated treatments.

When infestations become severe, using labeled insecticides containing active ingredients such as spinosad, permethrin, acetamiprid, or zetamethrin can be effective. These treatments should be applied when beetles or small larvae first appear for best results. It is important to follow all label directions carefully, including application rates and pre-harvest intervals.

The most effective potato beetle control strategy combines all of these methods. By using cultural practices to prevent infestations, monitoring crops regularly, and applying insecticides when necessary, growers can protect their plants and increase yield.

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Indoor Plants

May is a great time to repot indoor plants. Giving them adequate lighting and proper soil mixtures can help them grow rapidly during the spring and summer months.

Light is the most important thing to consider when doing indoor gardening. When choosing indoor plants, make sure to take note of if they have low, medium, or high light requirements. Depending on the light requirements, a plant may need to be placed in different areas such as a south facing window for high light requirement plants and a north facing window for a low light requirement plant. If there is little light indoors, artificial lighting such as LED grow lights can be used.

When repotting your indoor plants, you will need to replace old soil to allow plants to get proper nutrients. The best potting soil for growing indoor plants will usually be a recipe mixture that gives ideal conditions for moisture, drainage, and nutrient-holding capacity, porosity, and plant stability. These soils can be bought in local garden stores or homemade:

Standard Mix

- 1 measure of packaged potting soil or 1 measure of sterilized garden loam
- 1 measure of coarse organic material
- 1 measure of perlite
- 1 measure of coarse, clean sand
- Mix thoroughly and sterilize. After sterilization, add dolomitic lime at a rate of 1 ounce (28 grams) per gallon of soil mixture.

Cacti and Succulent Mix

- 1 measure of packaged potting soil or 1 measure of sterilized garden loam
- ½ measure of coarse organic material
- ½ measure of perlite
- 1 measure of coarse, clean sand
- Mix thoroughly and sterilize. After sterilization, add dolomitic lime at a rate of 1 ounce (28 grams) per gallon of soil mixture.

For more information on indoor plant care, check out our publication titled “Care and Selection of Indoor Plants.”

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Prepare Your Landscape for Summer Heat

In south Mississippi, heat can be relentless on a garden. High temperatures, intense sun, and periods of drought can quickly stress plants and reduce yields. The good news is that with a few proactive steps, you can help your garden thrive through the hottest months.

Water Deep, Not Often

One of the most common mistakes gardeners make is shallow, frequent watering. This encourages weak, shallow root systems that struggle in heat.

- Water deeply 2–3 times per week
- Aim for early morning (before 9 a.m.)
- Rule of thumb is 1-inch of rainfall or irrigation per week

Deep watering encourages roots to grow downward, making plants more resilient during dry spells. And don't forget those large trees during a drought!

Add Mulch

Mulch acts like insulation for your soil keeping it cooler and locking in moisture. It reduces weed-seed germination, prevents compaction, and adds aesthetic value. Good mulch options include:

- Pine straw – 6-8 inches
- Shredded leaves – 2-3 inches (whole leaves 6 inches)
- Wood bark – 2-3 inches (pine, cypress or hardwood)
- Compost – 2-3 inches
- Newspapers – 3-6 sheet layers
- Others

Apply mulch around plants but keep it a couple of inches away from stems to prevent rot. Mulch alone can reduce soil temperature dramatically and cut watering needs. Hay isn't recommended due to weed seed and the potential for herbicide residue.

Choose Heat-Tolerant Plants

Not all plants are created equal when it comes to heat in the south. Consider planting heat-tolerant and/or native plants in your landscape. There are many good choices but some include:

- Lantana
- Zinnias
- Stoke's Aster
- Turk's Cap
- Purple Coneflower
- Salvia
- Ornamental Grasses
- Angelonia

These plants are naturally adapted to high temperatures and will keep producing when others struggle.

Preparing your landscape for summer heat can save you a lot of time and energy. By watering wisely, protecting your soil, and choosing the right plants, you can maintain a productive and vibrant garden all season long.

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Termites

We are approaching Mother's Day, meaning it's about the time we start seeing the, what seems like, endless swarms of termites! Termites are active 365 days a year, but we tend to be more mindful of them in the spring because this is when they swarm.

Having large numbers of termite swarmers emerge inside a building is a sure sign the building is infested and needs to be professionally treated. It is also a good idea to be alert for signs of termite infestation when doing home repairs or maintenance or when working in flower beds around the foundation of a building. It is even more important to know when your house was last treated for termites.

Swarming termites are attracted to light at night. In the spring when termites are swarming, you can prevent attracting the swarms by turning off external lights around your home. Limiting the internal lights will also help keep the swarming termites from trying to enter your home. If you have a few termites wonder into your home while swarming, don't panic because it's likely not an issue. Termites need moisture to survive so they will desiccate and die soon. However, if you see a lot of termites fluttering around inside the home, chances are they were already there and the home should be treated.

If you don't have an active termite contract on your home or at least have a record of when the house was last treated, it is probably time to have the house treated. See Extension publication 2568, *Protect Your House from Termites*, for information on how to recognize signs of termite infestation and for answers to common questions about termite treatments.

Private Applicator Certification Training

The MSU Extension Service conducts courses of training for private pesticide applicators wishing to obtain certification. A private applicator is defined as an individual who is at least 18 years of age and who is producing an agricultural commodity on his/her land or on rented land.

Visit https://myaccount.extension.msstate.edu/ to take the course online. Select Register through the MSU Canvas Portal. Fill in all required fields including personal information, physical address, mailing address, and password for your account. After all required fields are filled with your information, select Sign UP. You will receive an email with instructions to finish setting up your account.

For those needing a private applicator license and do not want to take it online, please contact your local Extension office.

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