MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™ EXTENSION

# County Gardeners Extension Express

MULTI COUNTY

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## Managing Citrus Fruit Splitting



If you grow citrus in your home landscape, you may have noticed fruit splitting open before it's ready to harvest. One day the fruit looks healthy, and the next it has a crack in the peel that exposes the juicy flesh inside. This problem, known as citrus fruit splitting, can be frustrating for home gardeners, especially when a tree has produced a promising crop.

Fruit splitting is a physiological disorder that's generally associated with uneven fruit growth, changes in water availability, and differences in how quickly the inner fruit and outer rind develop. One of the most important contributing factors is a sudden change in soil moisture.

During dry weather, citrus fruit may develop a relatively thick, firm rind. When substantial rainfall or irrigation follows a dry period, the tree takes up water and the fruit's interior can expand rapidly. If the rind cannot stretch quickly enough to accommodate that expansion, it may crack. In South Mississippi, late-summer and early-fall weather can shift from hot, dry conditions to periods of heavy rainfall. Satsumas and other citrus varieties may be approaching maturity during this time, making fruit splitting a concern for backyard growers. The exposed flesh may dry out, become discolored, or develop mold as the damaged fruit deteriorates. Split fruit is more susceptible to decay and insect damage.

However, moisture fluctuations are not the only factor. Citrus fruit splitting has also been associated with nutritional imbalances, particularly inadequate potassium, as well as environmental stress and differences in rind development. Fruit splitting can vary considerably among cultivars, and not every tree will experience the problem to the same degree.

While there is no guaranteed way to prevent citrus fruit splitting, several management practices may reduce its occurrence. Maintain consistent soil moisture. Water citrus trees weekly during extended dry periods, applying water slowly and deeply to the root zone. Consistent irrigation can help reduce dramatic swings in soil moisture when rainfall returns. However, citrus planted in poorly drained areas may experience additional root stress so planting in well-drained soil is necessary.

Test the soil before applying fertilizer. Nutrient deficiencies can contribute to fruit-quality problems, but applying fertilizer without knowing the soil's nutrient status can create other problems. A soil test can help determine whether potassium or other nutrients need correction. Avoid excessive nitrogen fertilization, which can encourage vigorous vegetative growth at the expense of balanced fruit development. Discard fallen fruit.

Citrus fruit splitting can be disappointing, but it does not necessarily mean a tree is unhealthy or that the entire crop will be lost. Weather plays a major role, and even well-maintained trees may develop split fruit during unfavorable conditions. But good cultural practices can improve the chances of bringing more healthy citrus fruit to harvest.



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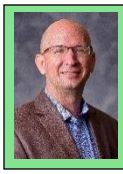
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# Plant Now for a Beautiful Spring: Bulbs & Wildflowers

Fall is the perfect time to plan ahead for a colorful spring garden. Planting spring-flowering bulbs and wildflower seeds now gives many plants time to establish roots before winter, rewarding us with beautiful blooms when warmer weather returns.

Spring-flowering bulbs such as daffodils, Dutch iris, and other varieties suited to our Southern climate can add cheerful splashes of color to garden beds, borders, and naturalized areas. Choose a location with well-drained soil and plenty of sunlight. Plant bulbs at the depth recommended for each variety, usually two to three times the bulb's height, with the pointed end facing up. Water thoroughly after planting to help encourage root development.

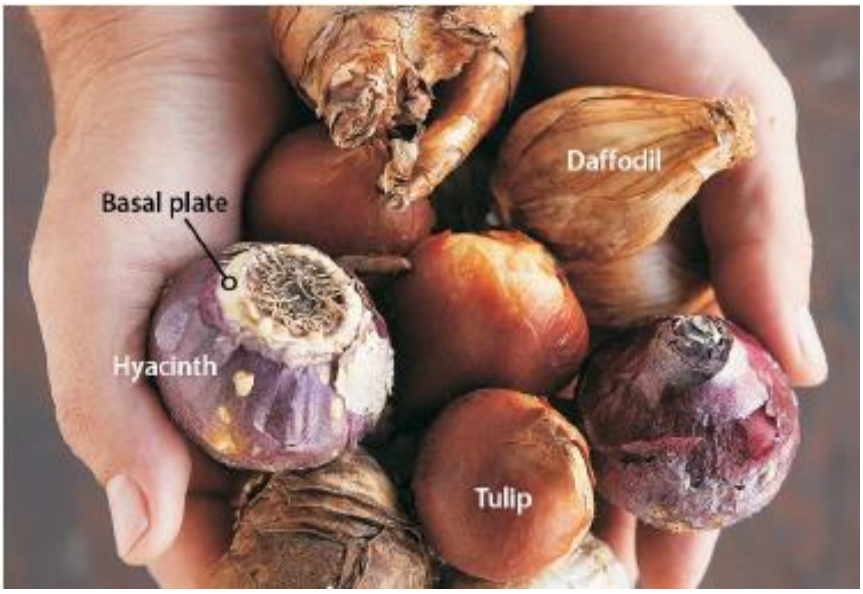
Fall is also an excellent time to sow many wildflower seeds. Prepare the planting area by removing weeds and lightly loosening the soil. Scatter seeds according to package directions, then gently press them into the soil to ensure good contact. Many wildflowers prefer sunny locations and well-drained soil. Choose species suited to Mississippi's growing conditions for the best results.

Wildflowers provide more than beauty. They can attract butterflies, native bees, and other beneficial pollinators while adding a natural, colorful touch to the landscape. Consider planting a mixture of native wildflowers to provide a succession of blooms throughout the spring and summer.

Whether you plant a few bulbs along a walkway or create a meadow filled with wildflowers, a little work this fall can make a big difference next spring. Plant now and let nature surprise you with a beautiful display of color when spring arrives!










# Garden Calendar: November

**Plant**



- Plant shrubs and trees after soil cools.
- Plant summer blooming perennials: Iris, Daylily, and Daisies. Plant winter and spring annuals: Pansy, Pinks, Flowering Cabbage, and Kale.
- Root Rose cuttings.



**Water**

- Water all newly planted trees and plants regularly.

**Prune**



- Remove dead limbs and prune evergreen shrubs.
- Cut off tops of brown perennials, leave roots in the soil.

**Do Not Prune**

- Do not prune spring flowering shrubs such as Azaleas, Hydrangeas, Mock Orange, Spirea, and Flowering Quince because flower buds are already forming.
- Delay pruning of most trees and shrubs until February since any new growth stimulated by pruning may be killed by a sudden freeze.

**Miscellaneous**



- Put leaves and spent annuals into compost bin.
- Add mulch to your garden and all ornamental beds for winter protection.
- Repair and sharpen garden tools, store with light coat of oil to prevent rusting.
- Build bird feeders and houses.

**In Bloom**

- Impatiens, Cannas, Roses, Witch Hazel, Gerbera Daisies, Sweet Olive, Camellias, Sasanquas, Japanese Plum, and Poinsettias.



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# Goldenrod

Late summer and fall bring an array of new colorful plants in Mississippi. Wild goldenrod species are commonly seen blooming starting in late August around South Mississippi. These native plants have yellow blooms that and easily seen along roadsides, among forests, and in pastures. Some varieties, such as Tall Goldenrod (*Solidago altissima)*, can grow up to six feet tall.







Goldenrod is often considered the reason for fall allergies; however, this is not the case. Ragweed blooms at the same time as goldenrod. These smaller plants are often overlooked due to the more visible goldenrod species. Ragweed species are the true cause of fall allergies. Ragweed pollen is easily disturbed and transported by the wind due to how small the pollen grains are.




Goldenrod is a favorite among pollinators due to the large pollen grains it produces. Their bright yellow flowers attract a variety of pollinators including bees, butterflies, moths, flies, spiders, and beetles. In fact, honeybees usually forage on goldenrod when making fall honey. Goldenrod honey produced in the fall is usually much darker than honey harvested earlier in the year.

Wildlife animals also benefit from the presence of goldenrod. Hummingbirds get nectar from goldenrod blooms. Turkeys, white-tailed deer, and rabbits sometimes forage on the basal rosettes during the winter months. White-tailed deer also eat the leaves and stems during the spring and summer. Some bird species even eat goldenrod seeds after blooms have faded.





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# Good Sanitation Helps Prevent Disease

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 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 dis-infect tools between cuts. A spray solution of 1 part bleach to 19 parts water (5%) is effective.

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.



**Diseased plant material such as fallen leaves and fruit, as well as diseased stems, can serve as sources for disease in the home landscape.**

# Calendar of Upcoming Events

| Date | Event |
|---|---|
| **Dec. 8th** | **The Hancock-Harrison County Forestry & Wildlife Association will host its Annual Business Meeting and program with registration beginning at 6:00 PM at the County Farm Road Shelter located at 15038 County Farm Rd. in Gulfport. Jim "Bubba" Wyly, a partner with Phelps Dunbar's law office in Gulfport, will be our guest speaker. He will be discussing Liability & Property Rights, Trespassing Laws, Adverse Possession, and similar topics that affect or may help protect landowners. Our annual business meeting will follow. Preregistration is required by Dec. 4th by calling the Harrison County Extension office at 228-731-8567 or by emailing Tim Ray at tim.ray@msstate.edu. This is no cost to attend and a meal will be provided.** |

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.



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# Leaves Aren't Trash: Put Fall Leaves to Work



As November arrives, falling leaves become a familiar sight across Mississippi. For many homeowners, that means raking, bagging, and hauling them to the curb or burn pile. But, those leaves don't have to be treated as waste. They can be put to good use right in your own landscape.

One of the easiest options is to use fallen leaves as mulch. Shredded leaves can be spread around trees, shrubs, and landscape beds where they help conserve moisture, suppress weeds, and eventually break down and add organic matter to the soil. Running over dry leaves a few times with a lawn mower is usually enough to shred them. Just remember to keep mulch pulled back from the trunks of trees and shrubs rather than piling it against them.

You can also leave some leaves on the lawn. A light layer can be chopped up with a mulching mower and allowed to settle into the turf. The smaller pieces will gradually decompose. However, don't allow a thick layer of whole leaves to remain on the grass. Too many leaves can block sunlight and reduce air movement, which can damage the turf underneath.

Fall leaves are also great for the compost pile. Dry leaves provide the "brown," or carbon-rich, material that helps balance greener materials such as fresh grass clippings and many kitchen scraps. Shredding the leaves will help them break down faster. The September County Gardeners Extension Express even reminded gardeners to prepare compost bins in anticipation of autumn leaves.

Don't feel like every leaf has to disappear. Leaves can be allowed to decompose beneath shrubs or in natural areas where a perfectly manicured appearance isn't necessary. One exception is heavily diseased plant material, which may need to be removed as part of good garden sanitation.

However, not every leaf should stay in the landscape. If a tree or shrub has had a significant leaf disease, removing and disposing of fallen leaves can help reduce the amount of disease-causing material that remains around the plant. Diseased leaves are also best left out of home compost piles, since most home piles may not get hot to destroy plant pathogens.



So, before you bag up your leaves this fall, put some of them to work. Mulch them, mow them, compost them, or leave them where appropriate. Your landscape can benefit from something you might otherwise throw away.



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# Fall / Winter Pasture Notes



With the slightest fall feel to our sunrises the past few days I have developed a slight itch to start planting a few oats, maybe a little ryegrass in the next few weeks. That itch must be spreading, as we have had several calls the past few days for information on ryegrass varieties, planting rates, and other cool season forages.

As you consider what to plant, how much, and when there are lots of variables to consider. From available acreage, your number of animals to graze, stage of reproduction / growth the animals are in, equipment available, current weather…. All of those are just a start to the list of considerations for planting cool season forages.

For this article I'd like to point out for ryegrass we have many varieties (60 +) available that offer good grazing when used in the right situation, but most come down to a primary difference. Is it a tetraploid or diploid, which is based on the number of chromosomes in the grass. Diploid varieties have two sets of chromosomes (2n = 14) in each cell; their cells are smaller in size with lower water (moisture) content; their plant structures, leaf and seed size are smaller; and the plants tend to produce more tillers. Higher tiller density can provide a denser stand, be more competitive with weeds, and sustain production in lower fertility and wetter soils. Diploids also tend to have a more prostrate growth (horizontal) type, which allows the stand to be more persistent in heavy grazing scenarios. On the other hand, tetraploid varieties have four sets of chromosomes (4n = 28) in each cell with larger cell sizes, wider leaves, larger seed size, greater content of soluble carbohydrates (sugar and starch), and less fiber content. Tetraploids tend to have higher water content in their cells; therefore, animals will need to consume more forage to achieve the same dry matter intake than when grazing diploid types of annual ryegrass.

While both have great attributes, a keynote that bears repeating is that we consistently see diploids tend to germinate faster in the fall often leading to earlier grazing when moisture is available, but tetraploids are slower maturing in the spring, adding more days of grazing to the spring growing season. Depending on your grazing needs there are times to plant these types of grass separately and times we may consider mixing them. In a situation where we need the ryegrass to mature early for summer grasses to grow in, a diploid variety may be a higher consideration. When grazing needs are high and more days of grazing are needed, mixing them can help to get early and late season grazing. When a need is there for added days on the springtime growth, and fall grazing needs are not as high, the slower maturing tetraploid grasses may be beneficial.

As you make your planting decisions this fall keep in mind that each annual ryegrass type and variety has its strengths and weaknesses; make sure that you select one that provides the greatest advantage for your unique grazing situation. Your management and use, along with the environment, will play big roles in which variety you decide to plant for grazing purposes. If we can be of any assistance, please contact us at your local Extension Office or check out the following links for information on cool-season forage publications.

https://extension.msstate.edu/publications/annual-ryegrass-performance-mississippi-long-term-yield-production

https://extension.msstate.edu/agriculture/forages/management-forages/grass-planting-rates