

Dr. Jeff Wilson, MSU Extension (662-566-8019)

“Fruit & vegetable gardening for the home, and fall/winter gardening”

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Dr. Wilson’s territory is northeast MS; the specialists dedicated to Lafayette County (662-234-4451) are Margaret Webb (mwebb@ext.msstate.edu) and Lance Newman (lancen@ext.msstate.edu)

General Gardening Recommendations

- * Consider planting fruit trees and shrubs for landscaping and shade trees because they provide multiple benefits.
- * Dr. Wilson first emphasized maintenance of fruit trees and shrubs, making recommendations for pruning, spacing, fertilization, watering
- * Regarding watering, he recommends 1 inch per week, perhaps increasing to 2 inches per week during fruit set. Mississippi receives about 1 inch of rain per week on average, but it is not always at the right time.
- * To decide if/how to fertilize, ideally you would submit a soil sample to the testing lab at MSU Extension, and they can tell you if/how your soil is deficient in particular nutrients. Focus your fertilizer on those deficiencies.
- * When choosing a fertilizer, choose one that is slow-release, contains micro-nutrients (e.g., magnesium, manganese, iron, copper, calcium) rather than just the macronutrients (N/P/K), and by a known name-brand (e.g., Stay-Green or Osmocote)
- * The MSU Extension website has lots of information about recommended varieties and other tips
- * For example, their “Garden Tabloid” publication (available at the office or online: <http://msucare.com/lawn/garden/vegetables/>) provides specific recommendations on how many plants of each vegetable are needed to feed a family of a particular size. This is important to consider when planning your garden. You should also consider when your vegetables will be ripe, so that you will not be on vacation when everything is coming on.

Fruit Gardening Tips

- * Recommended varieties of blueberries for our area include Climax, Tifblue, and Powderblue. Blueberries should be pruned soon after harvest.
- * Recommended variety of persimmon is Fuyu
- * Recommended varieties of blackberries are thornless, and include Navajo, Arapaho, Apache, and Ouachita

Vegetable Gardening Tips:

- * For fall/winter gardening, you should plant seeds by Sep. 1. Can plant transplants/starts several weeks later. Note that the average first killing frost happens on October 26.

* Examples for planting now: Carrots (seed), lettuce, arugula, collards, kale, radishes (seed), turnips (seed), chard

* Mulching (e.g., with a layer of dead leaf mulch) is an important strategy for keeping down weeds and holding moisture in the soil. When buying wheat straw for mulching in the garden, make sure you buy from a field that was not treated with herbicides or pesticides; otherwise, runoff from the straw may kill your other plants.

Q&A from the audience:

* **Question:** If you are not going to plant a fall or winter crop for harvest, what should you do?

* **Answer:** Best alternative is to plant a cover crop (e.g., hairy vetch or cowpeas), and then till it into the soil in late winter / early spring, about 1 month before you plant your spring/summer garden. Such legume cover crops will not only conserve your soil, but will also add nitrogen to it. Vetch may need to be weed-whacked each month to prevent it from seeding.

* **Question:** We had a lot of disease in the garden this year, especially blight on tomatoes; any suggestions?

* **Answer:** This year we had weather that particularly favored disease, with lots of rain. But for disease control, it's important to harvest quickly and remove diseased plants and fruit. Do not allow diseased fruit and plants to persist in the garden area, as they will spread disease to other plants by the wind. It is also important to rotate tomatoes among different places in your plot each year. Fungicide can also be really useful for controlling blight, but is most effective when applied early and regularly, as a preventative measure.

* **Question:** How should we maintain our pathways, as a community garden?

* **Answer:** For controlling bermuda grass in pathways, mowing is not a good idea because that will create a very tough turf, and it will get stronger and stronger. A one-time application of Round-up is a possibility, but would likely have side-effects on crop plants being grown at the time. Mainly, what we are already doing (hand-weeding, cardboard, and (non-treated) woodchips) is the best approach.

* For controlling all weeds, it's really important to pull them when they are small, to stay ahead of them. If you let them get big, it is exponentially more work to control them.