



**The Potting Shed** is a free monthly newsletter from the University of Georgia Extension in Bryan County. We provide science-based information to help Coastal Georgia gardeners. Have a question or need help, contact your local County Extension Office.

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## PENTAS

It's hot and people are searching for some colorful flowers that can take the Georgia heat and humidity while providing a dazzling display in the landscape. With those goals in mind, pentas are hard to beat. Like many other flowers, the pentas has been going through a revival of sorts with new varieties coming on the market at a very brisk pace. Among the new varieties gaining a lot of notice is the Graffiti series. The Graffiti is an F1 hybrid, award-winning Butterfly series. The Butterfly series reaches 20 to 24 inches tall, but the Graffiti series is more compact, reaching 12 to 15 inches. The Graffiti series is just making its debut this year so local garden centers may not have them. Don't fret because they mostly likely will have other great varieties. One of the selections in the new series is called Graffiti Red Lace. Blooms will be produced in abundance all summer long if beds are prepared correctly. Choose a site in full sun for best flower production. Prepare the bed by incorporating 3 to 4 inches of organic matter, and till to a depth of 8 to 10 inches. While tilling, incorporate 2 pounds of a slow-release, 12-6-6 fertilizer. The next step may be the most crucial to happiness with pentas. If the soil is acidic and you grow azaleas, camellias or blueberries with ease, add lime to the pentas' planting area. While preparing the soil, add 5 pounds of a pelletized lime per 100 square feet in sandy soil because pentas prefer a soil pH of 7. Many gardeners annually apply lime to grass or vegetable gardens, but in this case, a little will help the pentas keep their flowers all summer.

Pentas are loved by both butterflies and hummingbirds and fit any style of garden. You can put them in a tropical setting in front of bananas and elephant ears; in traditional gardens; or place them in a bed in front of evergreen shrubs like hollies, ligustrums, wax myrtles or junipers. By the way, they're also great in the vase as cut flowers.

When the Graffiti series becomes available, you'll want to give them a try.



## Master Gardener



The next Bryan County Master Gardener meeting will be on August 8th. Program on citrus cultivation in Coastal Georgia. The program will be at the Bamboo Farm at 6:30 pm. Everyone is welcome.



## Camellia Page



## What to do in Summer

In summer you need to keep a careful eye out for pests. Spider mites tend to be a problem in the early, dry part of the summer and less of a problem after the summer rains become regular.

Irrigation is especially important before the summer rains begin. Do not let your plants go until they show signs of drought stress. By then it may be too late. Keep your plants well mulched, but remember to keep the mulch away from the trunks. Now is a great time to air layer camellias. I have started air layering and have many already potted. I have two year old plants in three months.

The Bryan, Chatham, Effingham, Liberty and Glynn County Extension Offices are presenting a unique home owner's horticultural program. The program will have 16 classes, starting in October, 2006 and ending in June, 2007, 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. and will be held at the Bamboo Farm and Coastal Gardens on Highway 17 South in Chatham County. Upon completion of the classes, you will be able to adequately create and maintain your home landscape and garden. Cost will be \$75.00 for the series of classes. If you are interested, **let Dave Linvill or David Moulder know as soon as possible. [dlinvill@uga.edu](mailto:dlinvill@uga.edu) or [dmoulder@uga.edu](mailto:dmoulder@uga.edu). Applications are being accepted for the class now.**

A **fall** program of the Coastal Georgia Master Naturalists, an environmental education program developed for people who wish to know, change and preserve the relationships between habitats and our ecosystems will start August 23rd. If you are interested, or know someone who would like to participate, please contact your local County Agent or David Moulder 653-2231; [dmoulder@uga.edu](mailto:dmoulder@uga.edu).

## July-August

### Annual Flowers

If your flowerbed still looks empty this summer, there are a few tricks to filling in the voids. Instead of starting out with small plants in cell packs, buy bigger plant material in pints, quarts or one-gallon containers. This is definitely more expensive, but smaller plants have a lower chance of survival when started in the late summer.

Another way to spice up a bland looking landscape is to transplant hanging baskets into your flowerbed or a larger decorative patio pot. There are a few plants that like it when the temperatures soar such as Melampodium, Coleus, Marigolds, Impatiens, Begonia, Celosia, Evolvulus (Blue Daze) and Amaranthus.

The most impressive, but least used is probably the Amaranthus tricolor, commonly known as Joseph's coat. Like coleus, the foliage adds color to the garden rather than the flowers. Generally, the plant grows 3 to 4 feet tall and is used in the middle or back of an informal garden. The stems make great additions to cut flower arrangements, if you need to keep the height a little lower. The leaf colors vary with variety. For red and bronze colors plant 'Early Splendor'. 'Joseph's Coat' leaves are a mix of yellow, red and green. The cultivar 'Illumination' has red and gold upper leaves while the lower leaves are green and bronze. Amaranthus will tolerate direct sunlight and likes the oppressive summer heat, which is typical for Georgia in July and August.

A few plants (Cosmos, Zinnia, Mexican sunflower and Cleome) can still be sown from seed directly into the flower garden. The best choice may be cosmos if the soil is poor and dry. There are two main varieties of cosmos. Cosmos sulphureus blooms are vibrant shades of gold, yellow, orange and scarlet. Cosmos bipinnatus blooms are more satiny in shades of rose, pink, magenta and white.

### Bulbs

Crowded iris plants should be divided now. I know it seems odd to separate and move clumps of plants during the hot time of the year, but bearded iris is the exception. Cut the leaf blades into a small fan shape and reset the divided clumps in a sunny, well-drained location. Plant the rhizomes no deeper than one inch. Transplanting now makes sure that the roots are established before winter. Now is also the best time to relocate spider lilies and daffodils while the yellow foliage is still slightly attached.

### Perennial Flowers

Purple cone flower, rudbeckia and Shasta daisy are basically roadside weeds that geneticists have fiddled with to make them grow shorter, form tighter clumps and bigger blooms. They still have a very high tolerance for dry conditions. These plants are proven winners in hot flowerbeds. They bounce back great from planting shock this time of year.

## **Fruit**

Water is the most limiting factor during the summer. If you want plump, juicy fruit, then fruit trees must receive a good watering once a week. When nature doesn't provide this, you need to turn on the hose and supply it. Pecan trees will sometimes drop nuts in August due to insufficient water.

Prune blueberry bushes after the harvest. They must put on new growth and set flower buds before winter sets in. Make the cuts 6 inches above last year's pruning cut. The new growth will form on previous year's wood. If the entire bush is too tall, then the pruning will have to take place over a two-year period. To lower the overall height, severely prune half of the plant this year (not all on one side but rather throughout the plant) and tip prune the remaining stems. Next year, cut back the remaining taller branches and tip prune the new growth on the lower branches that you pruned the previous year. This is the only way to really lower the height and still have berries each year.

## **Lawns**

A key word during summer is - WATER. Last year during the drought, I killed more plants by over-watering them than from neglect. This was the scenario. The yard grass needed watering every 6 to 10 days, since it would never rain. I was trying to cover as much ground as possible with the sprinkler but the water was hitting my flower and shrub beds as well as the thirsty turf. The beds are raised with loads of organic matter. They are a dream to dig in. Anyway, I watered enough to keep the turf alive (not thriving) but I drowned several plants in my beds. Hint: A plant suffering from lack of water exhibits the very same symptoms as one that is being over-watered, i.e. drooping foliage, branch die back. I could have prevented this by simple feeling of the soil in the beds. This is a word of warning. Turf and enriched flowerbeds require very different amounts of irrigated water.

## **Trees and Shrubs**

The middle of the summer is not a good time to plant or transplant woody plants. Plants with established root systems have a hard enough time surviving. Installed irrigation is the only possible hope for summer plantings.

With energy prices soaring, this is a great time to review what's shading your home or parts of your yard during the day. The temperature under a tree is definitely cooler and can reduce air conditioning needs by 30 percent or more. Plant deciduous trees on the southwestern and western side of your home. Don't cause yourself more problems by planting trees too close to your foundation or drive-ways. Plant trees at least 12 feet away from your home.

Insect populations are at their highest during the summer. Sucking or piercing type insects normally reside on the underside of leaves. The leaves will appear speckled because the green chlorophyll has been destroyed in small patches. Since most insecticides are contact killers, it's very important to spray where the insects are located - on the underside of the leaves.

## Vegetables

Tomatoes, bell peppers, lima beans and snap beans may stop producing fruit for a short time during the summer. When the temperature soars above 95 degrees, pollen is killed and the stigma (female receptacle for the pollen) dries up. This is only a temporary set back. Do not pull up the plants. They will start producing fruit again when the temperature falls.

All (green) bell peppers will turn or change color if you let them ripen on the plant longer. Riper peppers are sweeter, more flavorful and softer than green peppers. Leaving edible fruit on a plant does have several disadvantages. Bird and other critters will also think that the fruit is tastier. Plus, insects and diseases will have an additional 10 to 14 days to attack the fruit as it ripens. Hot peppers develop the most "heat" during dry, sunny weather. This is because capsaicin develops best under hot, dry, sunny conditions. For milder peppers pick the peppers after a day or two of cloudy weather.

The end of July is the best time to start tomato plants for the fall. Remove a few suckers from the healthiest tomato plants in your garden, dip the ends in rooting hormone and stick them in a well-watered part of the garden. The tomato cuttings will develop roots in 2 weeks and be transplantable in 5 weeks. In late August, you can enjoy fried green tomatoes and by September, BLT sandwiches with flavor are back. It may seem odd to think about fall vegetables but the end of August is when you start cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower seeds in flats. It takes about 6 weeks to get a nice sized transplant from seed and October 15 (planting date).

## Native Plant of the Month



### Deer Tongue, Vanilla Plant *Carphephorus odoratissimus*

Absolutely great plant that when given just a little tender love and care (meaning water) turns into a succulent beauty for the flower bed. The unusual leaves have red markings on them and late in the summer brilliant purple flowers will spring forth. That's not all, if you don't like the plant and if the flowers are not what you expected then you will have to love the vanilla odor covering the gardens in the late afternoon, Wait there is more, collect a few leaves and dry them for flavoring your favorite smoke. I have several I collected by the roadside and find them a welcome beauty to the flower bed.