

**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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## **Coleus and Garden Flowers Make a Pretty Good Match**

**Color Disclaimer:** Please understand, I am the person whose wife has to color code my clothes to make sure I don't get a fashion ticket. Color matching is absolutely on the bottom of the list of my attributes. So, as you read this article, be aware that, when my wife IS NOT around, I just put plants in the ground and if they look good to me, then that's all I need. If the arrangement accidentally compliments each other, then I know that it WAS purely an accident.

I saw a planting late last summer and I thought it would be easy for anyone, even me, to duplicate. It had rudbeckias, petunias and coleus. My thinking was... just go out and get the plants and put them in the ground. NOT.....

The tallest of the flowers were the rudbeckias. There are so many different ones I can't tell you all the names. These were green-eyed rudbeckias which are large gloriosa-type daisies, similar to the brown-eyed rudbeckias. Both reach 24 to 36 inches tall and are well suited to the back of the border. They are also excellent cut flowers.

The planting went with the opposite, or complementary color scheme -- choosing the almost iridescent Easy Wave Blue petunia as the low plant in front of the rudbeckias.

Next it was time to purchase the Wave petunias. Remember, there are now Waves, Easy Waves and Tidal Waves. While the old Pink Wave and Purple Wave are both outstanding plants, they have different characteristics. The Purple Wave is more ground hugging, spreading and prostrate. The Pink Wave is mounding and doesn't spread as much. The name variations simply group the Waves into categories where they will have the same growth habit: Waves are spreading and prostrate, Easy Waves are spreading but more mounding, and Tidal Waves are the tallest. You may be able to find these at some of the big box stores, but you probably will have to try one of the landscape nurseries in the area.



The foliage from the coleus in this garden really set off the floral display. The coleus used was a new one called Wild Lime. It should be available to the public this spring. Its lime-green margins pick up the

green eye of the rudbeckias while the yellow in the center matches the primrose yellow tips of the daisy. And since it is partnered with petunias and rudbeckias, then it is a sun-tolerant coleus.

This is just one example of how coleus can be partnered with flowers. The season is just getting started, so make sure you prepare your beds for good drainage and aeration. I would also like to stress that you should be bold in your plantings and use different textures and colors. A combination of different styles, types and colors might not work for everyone, but it is your design and if you like it, then that is all that counts. For me, when my wife IS around, I just plant what she tells me to. And that definitely works best for me!

## CAMELLIAS



### What to do in March?

As your bushes finish blooming you should begin fertilizing them. If your soil pH is too high (a tell-tale sign is yellowing of the leaves along the veins-yellow splotches on variegated varieties is simply a manifestation of the virus that is variegating the petal and is NOT a sign of too high a soil pH) you probably need to use a fertilizer that acidifies the soil. In this case any azalea/camellia special or blueberry special will work. If your soil pH is OK then a normal balanced fertilizer with minor elements is adequate. In cases where the leaves are *really* yellowed you may apply chelated iron to the foliage of the plant. Camellias cannot absorb iron, in its usual form, from the soil if the soil pH is too high (resulting in yellowed leaves), but it can absorb chelated iron even when the soil pH is elevated. Consider the application of chelated iron as a quick fix and make sure to take care of the real problem - wrong soil pH.

When your camellias begin to flush out with new growth do not be alarmed to see leaves on the plant turn yellow and brown and fall off. This is the time when camellias shed their three year old leaves.

Some members treat their plants at this time with systemic insecticides (like Cygon) to protect the new growth.

The difference between a head table bloom and a runner-up is often the condition of the foliage. Aphids, caterpillars and beetles tend to be the biggest pests now.

## **Bulbs**

The spring blooming bulbs will show their full color in mid to late March. Seventy-five percent of the spring performing bulbs planted in Georgia are: Daffodils, hyacinth and iris. If you have trouble getting your flowering bulbs to come back year after year, then here are a few suggestions that should increase your success. First, check the amount of sunlight. The planting site must get at least six hours of morning, afternoon or constant dappled light after the surrounding trees have leafed out. The bulbs must have light for their leaves so they can replenish the energy and nutrients needed to bloom next spring. Secondly, the bulbs need water while growing, but absolutely must have good drainage throughout the year. Sandy-loam is the ideal soil for bulbs. Since most of us have to deal with more clayey type soil, the best planting method may be to build up your flowerbeds on top of the clay. Till in several inches of decomposed organic matter, plant the bulbs shallowly, top with several more inches of topsoil and then mulch. The bulbs will grow up through the topsoil and develop healthy roots in the good organic material. The third trick to getting loads of blooms is to fertilize every fall/winter. Use a complete N-P-K fertilizer such as 10-10-20 bulb booster. If you have waited too late to apply the granular fertilizer, then use a water-soluble type that can reach the roots quickly. Do not tie, twist, bend down, braid or pin the foliage after blooming. The foliage needs time to regain energy for the bulb. If your foliage looks ragged then it may be a lack of one of the key elements: Sunlight, water or nutrients. You can cut the foliage or cover it with mulch when the leaves turn yellow. It's time to divide when the flowers get small and few in numbers.

In order to create graceful drifts, try planting just a few different kinds of one type of bulb in a large "S" or "C" shaped beds. For indoor vase arrangements, cut the flowers when they are still in bud form or slightly opened.

## **Fruiting Shrubs and Trees**

Fire blight bacterium on apple, crabapple and pear trees (also ornamental types) will start to show up after the blooms drop off. It starts with a blackening of the new leaves and then progresses down the branch. An antibiotic (streptomycin, agri-mycin) found at any garden center, nursery or county co-op must be sprayed when the fruit tree is blooming to help stop the blight. The bacteria over winters in blight wounds that were left on the tree from last year. The wounds contain bacterium spores and ooze a sugary gel that attracts bees and wasps. These insects are also attracted to the fruit tree blooms and spread the blight spores to the tips of the soft new growing tips. Spraying the entire tree with the antibiotic four times during the bloom period will keep it from spreading throughout the tree. *(This is not my recommendation) Please understand most folks do not have the capability to spray and this is too expensive to hire someone for something that probably will not work anyway.*

As peach, plum, apple and pear tree buds begin to swell, the temperature required to damage the flower bloom changes from below 5° F to 25° F. Be prepared to cover your fruit trees with a tarp, blanket or spread if the temperature drops below freezing. Continue planting bare-root trees, shrubs and vines such as apple, grape, blackberry and strawberries. Shy away from buying deciduous plants that have already started to leaf out. Be sure to keep new plantings well watered.

## **Vegetables and Herbs**

March is the time to start all spring garden plants. Plant tomato, pepper, cucumber, cantaloupe and eggplant seed in individual cells or cups. Keep them moist (not wet) and warm until the seeds germinate. After the plants are visible, keep them in as much light as possible. The end of March signals warmer soil temperatures and the end of winter.

## **Vegetables and Herbs Continued:**

Cool soil does not promote root development; so don't be in too much of a hurry to set out your precious warm season crops. The first week in April is a much better time for setting out these vegetable transplants.

## **Ground Covers and Lawns**

When forsythia (yellow bells) and bridal wreath spirea are in full bloom then it's time to put out a pre-emergence herbicide to control summer weeds. This is your last chance to keep annual weeds from germinating and making an unsightly mess in your manicured lawn. Our warm-seasoned turf grasses will begin to green-up in late March. Do not fertilize yet, save that chore for April and May. Stimulate new growth by removing dead grass or leaves that have accumulated on your lawn. If you are raking up loads of dead grass blades then you probably have a diseased lawn. Be prepared to apply a granular and / or liquid fungicide the moment you start to see new blade growth. An application of granular lime at 40 pounds per 1,000 sq. ft. will also help. The problem will not disappear if you continue to ignore it. If you do not see at least one sprig of turf grass every foot then plan on re-sodding the area in April.

Revitalize evergreen groundcovers by cutting them back. New spring growth will quickly cover up any bare spots if you get too carried away. Hedge shears are the best tool to use for pruning vines used as ground covers (English ivy, periwinkle, confederate jasmine and honeysuckle). Use hand pruners on the more woody-type ground covers (cotoneaster, dwarf nandina and juniper). Set the lawn mower on its highest setting and mow off the tops of ajuga, liriopse and mondo grass. Take the extra time to rake up the cut leaf blades (or bag them with the mower) and remove from the area. This will help prevent re-infection of the new growth by any leaf spot disease.

## **Shrubs and Trees**

Early flowering shrubs should be pruned after they bloom. The most popular shrub surrounding our homes is the evergreen azalea. This shrub is not native but has adapted well to Southeast Georgia. Azaleas come in a wide variety of flower colors, sizes and shapes. The bloom times also vary so plant early, mid and late spring bloomers then tuck in a few fall performers (Encore Series). Try to stick with two color combinations when grouping plants. Do not scatter azalea shrubs throughout the yard (plant in mass blocks of color). Buy new plants when they are blooming if you need to match or compliment a house color.

The easiest way to kill your new plant purchase is to plant it in clay soil, (Richmond Hill area-do not plant flat). Azaleas like acid soil (pH 5 - 6) that is well drained but loaded with organic matter. Till in organic matter (aged leaf mold, compost) and sandy topsoil with the clay. Dig a shallow planting hole. Leave the top 2 inches of the root ball out of the soil and cover them with mulch. The mulch will help drain away any excessive moisture. Most azaleas really need very little pruning except to remove dead or injured wood. The exception is when that plant grows out over a walkway or needs to be contained for some reason. Prune azaleas before July or you will lose flowers next year.

Give them a boost of fertilizer after they have finished blooming. Water the plant before and after you apply fertilizer. This will stop any burn and get the fertilizer to the roots quickly. Be on the look out for petal blight disease on the azalea flowers. Petals will appear dotted or flecked, and collapse as if scalded when the blossoms are infected. Spraying a fungicide on the blooms will stop any re-infection of the disease and keep unopened blossoms healthy.

## Native Plant of the Month



### **Yellow Jasmine, *Gelsemium sempervirens***

This one is hard to beat. The first sign of spring and it blossoms into a beautiful fragrant bouquet of yellow mixed so often with the reds of the Red Maple. It is a climbing vine, with glossy evergreen, opposite leaves. Great native plant that can be used in the landscape on mailboxes, arbors, fences, tree trunks, trellises or just about anywhere you need to liven up a spot in early spring. It is also good in containers and as ground cover along steep banks. This plant is as beautiful as it is easy to grow. I know this is the same native plant that I used last year, but this plant just does so well in Southeast Georgia, I just had to feature it again this year..