Soil bag flower bed alternative to soil amending

By Krissy Slagle

Growing annual flowers in native soils can be a challenge in Georgia. Clay soils, though fertile, are often poorly drained, leading to root diseases. Sandy soils are generally less fertile and drain too quickly, making it hard to keep flowers watered and fed. Planting directly into a good bag of potting soil could be a better option.

Alternative to soil amending

University of Georgia Cooperative Extension experts say the key to improving soil is adding organic amendments. But sometimes, even adding organic matter yearly to flowerbeds doesn’t guarantee bountiful blooms.

In my personal garden, pine tree roots were a problem. It was difficult to work the compost in, and then the tree roots would grow into the improved soil and take up the water and nutrients that were meant for the annual plants.

This spring, tired of working so hard to keep my summer annuals growing in clay soils and going broke from buying containers, I decided to try planting right in the bags of potting soil. First I did some research. I read UGA Extension publications online and found some information on growing vegetables in bags, but not much on flowers.

At home gardening experiment

I decided to conduct my own research. First, I bought three 2-cubic-foot bags of potting soil from the home improvement store and laid them out where I wanted my flowers. I chose a potting mix that was moisture-retentive for summer planting, but for fall or winter plantings I would suggest using another mix. Waterlogged soils can kill annual plants.

Laying the bag flat, I cut drainage slits into one side of the bag. Next, I turned the bag over into place. Once I settled the bag and smoothed the soil, I used a razor knife to cut out a rectangle leaving about 2 to 3 inches of plastic all the way around. This helps keep the soil from washing out of the bag when you water the plants.

As it was summer, I added begonias and a small amount of slow-release fertilizer. Lastly, I mulched over and around the bags with pine straw.

Making mulch stay put

A few weeks out, the only drawback was keeping the mulch covering the plastic bag. The pine straw kept slipping and (Continued on page 6.)
While rabbits may seem cute and fuzzy, the common rabbit or eastern cottontail can do considerable damage to flowers, vegetables, trees and shrubs any time of the year in places ranging from suburban yards to rural fields and tree plantations. Controlling rabbits is often necessary to reduce damage, but complete extermination is not necessary, desirable or even possible.

No toxicants or fumigants are registered for use against rabbits. There are, however, chemical repellents available at local garden centers that may discourage rabbit browsing.

Repellents should be applied before rabbit-inflicted damage occurs and after a rain, heavy dew or the occurrence of new plant growth. If rabbits have already started feeding, their attraction to what they have been eating will most likely overcome their fear of the repellent.

Habitat modification and exclusion techniques provide long-term, non-lethal control. Remove dense, heavy vegetative cover, brush piles, weed patches and stone piles in or adjacent to the landscape.

Fencing made from chicken wire, with less than 1-inch mesh, can be placed around herbaceous plants. The fence must be at least 2-feet high and the bottom must be buried at least 3-inches deep. Quarter-inch wire hardware cloth made into 18- to 24-inch cylinders and buried at least 3 inches will protect trunks of young orchard trees or woody landscape plants.

In the winter months, live animal traps can be baited with corn cobs, oats, dried apples or rabbit droppings. Traps can be bought at garden centers, hardware stores or from gardening catalogs. Place the traps where rabbits have been feeding or resting and close to suitable cover.

If the trap fails to catch any rabbits within a week, move the trap to a different location.

For more information about managing wildlife in the garden, search for wildlife on www.extension.uga.edu/publications.

While they seem harmless in appearance, rabbits can do extensive damage to flowers, vegetables, trees and shrubs. Image credit: flickr user hjhipster

(Frank Watson is the University of Georgia Extension agent in Wilkes County, Ga.)
For those who enjoy gardening year-round, winter vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and an assortment of greens can be grown in the fall and winter. I like fall gardening because the temperatures are usually mild, disease pressure can be low if it’s dry and insects can be less troublesome after the temperatures drop. But for those who are ready for a little break from the vegetable garden, there are a few things you should do before you put your summer garden to bed.

It’s interesting to see how long the summer garden, planted way back in the spring, may last. I have pulled tomatoes and okra literally throughout October in years Georgia had a late frost. Other years, an early cold spell terminated those late-harvest plans.

When I first started gardening more than 25 years ago, there were times when I just gave up on the late-summer garden and let it lay idle throughout the fall and winter. I now know that is about the worst thing a gardener can do.

Many diseases and insects love to overwinter in crop residue from the past harvest and will be out in full force the following spring if left unchecked. Another problem is that old, over-mature vegetables will die on the plants and disperse seed that will ultimately germinate next spring where you don’t want them. This second generation of seed may well have cross-pollinated, producing plants that are inferior and different from what you actually planted.

Always pull up expired crops at the end of the season. Not doing so will create problems. Besides, those old corn stalks will make a great fall porch decoration.

The fall is a great time to work on conditioning your soil. If it’s been more than two years, take a soil sample to your local University of Georgia Cooperative Extension office. You need to know the pH of the soil. Fall is the best time to add lime if needed, as it takes several months for it to actually adjust the soil pH.

If it isn’t too wet, I till the garden to expose any insects, nematodes and soil pathogens to the cool, dry weather. This is a perfect time to add amendments such as compost or other organic matter like manures. Sometimes I spread fallen tree leaves over the garden and till them in. They break down quickly into rich organic matter. Shred the leaves first under the lawn mower or in a chipper and they will break down even faster.

After I have worked the soil and added organic matter, I plant a cover crop in areas of the garden that are not planted in winter vegetables. Cover crops offer several benefits. They help prevent erosion and add organic matter to the soil when tilled in early spring. And I think it looks good to have a bright green area of cover crops in your garden when everything else is brown and dormant.

If you plant crimson clover, you will be rewarded with a show of color when it blooms in the spring. I usually plant a combination of at least two types of seed mixed together, such as wheat or oats as a grass with a few pounds of crimson clover. The clover is a legume, or nitrogen-fixing plant, that will actually help the grass crop grow. In return, the
I know this is the time of year to start winter vegetables, but what vegetables do well around here, and have I missed the planting window on anything?

- Barb R., Royston, GA

There is such a great variety of vegetables that can be grown during the fall and winter in Georgia. Early September is a great time to start onions, garlic, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, cabbage, mustard, collards, carrots, beets, lettuce, spinach, radish and turnips.

All of these have fall planting dates in August or September for our area. Also, if you'd like to try a perennial vegetable, asparagus is one to plant in November and December. Numerous winter vegetables need a little less sunlight than summer vegetables, as winter vegetables are grown primarily for their leaves and/or roots, while summer crops (tomato, eggplant, squash and watermelon) are typically grown for their fruits.

Many winter vegetables are heavy feeders and typically need more fertilizer than the summer crops to which we are accustomed, so amend the soil accordingly.

If you are tired of gardening for 2015, try planting many of these crops in the late winter or early spring for harvest in April through June. That's one way to beat the spring planting itch, by already having a garden in the ground rather than putting out summer vegetables too early and worrying about frost.

Here is a great publication from the University of Georgia concerning vegetable gardening in Georgia. It contains a chart which has specific planting dates for crops in Georgia and planting and maintenance of those recommended vegetables.

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Did you know that UGA Extension has it’s very own food preservation guide? Now in its sixth edition, So Easy to Preserve includes chapters for preserving food, canning, pickled products, sweet spreads and syrups, freezing and drying. Each chapter includes a list of most frequently asked questions and a table of problems, causes and ways to prevent the problem from happening again. Each chapter is followed by a pocket page that allows you to keep notes and favorite recipes at your fingertips. So Easy to Preserve is an excellent resource for gardeners wanting to enjoy their harvest throughout the year! The book is $18 and can be purchased through the UGA Marketplace Store. You can download and print this order form to purchase the book by cash or check through the mail. If you have any questions regarding canning or food preservation, you can contact the Athens-Clarke County Extension office at 706-613-3640 and ask to speak with Family & Consumer Sciences agent Katie Hiers. You can also email Katie at khiers@uga.edu.

Happy canning! - Amanda
So much happens in the month of August: kids are going back to school, summer is winding down, and I even saw some shops with Christmas decorations! It is a great time of year. With all these changes taking place, sharing updates in the world of composting is a fantastic way to celebrate the month.

**Requiring compost**

For us composting enthusiasts, required composting is likely something we support and hope for! For some cities in the US, mandatory composting is actually a reality! Such a program exists now in Queens, NY; over 100,000 households participate. Each household has a system that includes a large outdoor bin and a smaller bin for inside the home. Similar to a curbside waste or recycling bin, the bigger bin is on wheels and has a lid secured with clamps to deter critters. The smaller container is used to collect kitchen food scraps. It features tiny vent holes and a secure lid. It can also be lined with a compostable bag that when filled can go directly into the outdoor bin.

Once collected, where do all these food scraps go? Rather than sending the food scraps to the landfill, they are distributed to farms located north of the city. New York, like many European countries, is utilizing the food scraps for soil nutrients and to generate fuel.

Major organizations are recognizing the value of composting. Sports teams such as the Seattle Mariners and Pittsburgh Pirates have implemented composting programs. (Continued on page 6.)
exposing the plastic. In an effort to prevent this, I cut two strips from a burlap coffee sack and tucked them over the front of the bags. This helped keep the pine straw in place.

Overall, the bag-planting experiment worked well. I plan to try this method this fall using violas, kale and other cool season annuals. If you have problems with your soil, give this technique a try for your fall annuals.

For more information on other gardening topics, contact your local UGA Extension office at 1-800-ASK-UGA1.

(Krissy Slagle is the assistant program coordinator for the Georgia Master Gardener program.)

After applying mulch, it is nearly impossible to determine what plants were planted directly into soil bags! Image credit: Clydette Alsup-Egbers, Missouri State University

wheat or oats act as a nurse crop to the clover, which is slower to establish and needs a little protective shade from the grass.

Clover should be inoculated first with the appropriate bacteria to aid in germination. A feed store or garden center should be able to assist you with getting the proper inoculum. An alternative might be to buy commercially produced wildlife mixes that are often planted for deer and turkey. These mixes come pre-inoculated. Remember to give cover crops some initial fertilization to get them started. About 15 pounds of 10-10-10 per 1000 sq. ft. should be sufficient.

(Bob Westerfield is a horticulturist for University of Georgia Extension.)

Plant crimson clover in your garden during the fall. The cover crop prevents erosion, adds organic matter and produces spring blooms. Image credit: flickr user Nathan Franke

Doing a few chores now will prepare your garden for later, continued...

composting programs to reduce the costs of sending trash to landfills and incinerators. In addition, composting reduces the production of greenhouse gases like methane that harm the ozone layer.

Readers, I don’t know about you, but I was absolutely thrilled putting together these composting updates. We are not alone in this endeavor. In fact, large groups are starting to follow in our footsteps. All of this progress in the world of composting exciting and inspiring! Each one of you, whether on a large or small scale, can make a difference! Your hard-working worms toil tirelessly to divert food scraps from our landfills. Each day as I observe my own worm bins, I feel inspired knowing that we are making a difference and doing our part!

(Reggie Schannie is a Georgia Master Composter Extension Volunteer.)
Attracting Pollinators to the Garden

Learn how to attract pollinators such as honeybees and hummingbirds to your yard during this free workshop taught by an Athens Area Master Gardener.

We’ll review what you can do to create the ideal habitat for these beautiful pollinators. Open to gardeners of all levels.

WHEN:
Wednesday, September 16
6-7:30 p.m.

WHERE:
Athens-Clarke County Library
2025 Baxter Street • Athens, GA

TO REGISTER:
Register by September 15 by contacting Athens-Clarke County Extension at (706) 613-3640 or atedrow@uga.edu.

The University of Georgia is committed to principles of equal opportunity and affirmative action.
The Seniors Garden Club hosted by the Athens Community Council on Aging meets on the first and third Thursday of the month from 10-11 a.m. Meetings are FREE. Contact 706-549-4850 for more information.

The Ladies Homestead Gathering of Athens meets the third Tuesday of each month from 6:30-9 p.m. at the Athens-Clarke County Extension office. Meeting topics range from gardening and composting to making bread and preparing herbal medicines. No experience necessary. For more information, contact lhgathensclarke@gmail.com.

On Thursdays, UGarden holds its weekly produce stand from 4:30-6 p.m. The student-run stand is located at 2500 S. Milledge Avenue by the big tan barn. Offerings include vegetables, shiitake mushrooms (in season), herbs and mixed herb teas. For more information, visit www.ugarden.uga.edu.

The Athens Farmers Market takes place each Saturday from 8 a.m.-noon at Bishop Park. Saturday markets include live music, chef demos and kids’ activities. A downtown market is held each Wednesday from 4-7 p.m. at Creature Comforts Brewing Co.

The West Broad Farmers Market is held each Saturday from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. at 1573 West Broad Street in Athens. The market features fresh produce and other foods, crafts, music and educational activities for youth and families. A produce stand is held each Tuesday from 4-7 p.m. at the same location.

On Saturday, September 5, Piccadilly Farm Nursery and Gardens in Bishop is holding a “Fall Container Class” at 10:30 a.m. Bring your own planter or purchase one from the farm. Participants will then create a colorful fall display from a selection of perennials. Cost is $30 and includes soil, plants and instruction. To register, call 706-765-4444 or email piccadillyfarm@att.net.

On Wednesday, September 16, Athens-Clarke County Extension will present the free gardening workshop “Attracting Pollinators to the Garden.” Held from 6-7:30 p.m. at the Athens-Clarke County Library, the workshop will discuss how to create the ideal habitat in your yard for these beneficial pollinators. To register, please call 706-613-3640 or email atedrow@uga.edu.

On Wednesday, September 30, the State Botanical Garden of Georgia is holding the Gold in Your Garden symposium at Gwinnett Tech in Lawrenceville. Learn design and growing tips for beautiful, reliable, easy-to-grow plants for Georgia gardens with Keynote speaker Alan Armitage. Cost is $75 in advance or $85 at the door. Lunch included. Register online at the State Botanical Garden website or call 706-542-1244.

During the first two weeks in October, the State Botanical Garden of Georgia is holding the 4th Annual Bluestems & Bluejeans Native Plant Sale at its Mimsie Lanier Center for Native Plant Studies. Nearly 200 native plant species raised on site will be on sale. All sales benefit the Garden’s Conservation program. For specific dates and times, visit the State Botanical Garden site at www.botgarden.uga.edu.

Ogletorpe County Bee Club is holding a Beekeepers Short Course on Saturday, October 24 from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. The program will include topics such as equipment and getting started, hive management, bee biology, diseases and pest management and more. The cost is $25 and includes lunch and a notebook. For questions, contact Glenn Galau at 706-207-8668. To register, visit www.ocbeeclub.org/workshops.

Gardening is learning, learning, learning. That’s the fun of it. You’re always learning.
- Helen Mirren
Non-Drought
Outdoor Water Use Schedule*
Effective August 8, 2013

allowed daily
Between 4:00 pm and 10:00 am
- Automated irrigation systems
- Hand watering (without a shut-off nozzle)
- Lawn sprinklers

odd/even schedule
No hourly restrictions
Even: Mon • Wed • Sat
Odd: Tues • Thurs • Sun
- Car washing at home
- Charity car washes
- Hosing driveways
- Outdoor cleaning
- Pressure washing by homeowner
- Topping-off pools

allowed anytime
By anyone
- Commercial pressure washing
- Drip irrigation or soaker hose
- Watering of food gardens
- Hand watering (with a shut-off nozzle)
- Hydroseeding
- Installation and maintenance of an irrigation system
- Irrigation of newly installed turf (for the first 30 days)
- Irrigation of public recreational turf areas
- Irrigation of plants for sale
- Irrigation of sports fields
- Water from a private well
- Water from an alternate source
  • grey water, rain water, condensate

Please note: The odd/even schedule still applies to non-landscape outdoor water use.

*This Non-Drought Outdoor Water Use Schedule is consistent with the Outdoor Water Use Rules set forth in the Georgia Water Stewardship Act that went into effect statewide on June 2, 2010.
Outdoor Water Restrictions:
Barrow, Oconee & Jackson Counties

Outdoor water use for Barrow, Oconee, and Jackson Counties is now limited to three days per week with even number addresses allowed to water on Saturday, Monday, and Wednesday and odd number addresses allowed to water on Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday. The ban on watering between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM remains in effect for all scheduled watering days. No outdoor watering is allowed on Fridays other than exemptions below.

THE FOLLOWING USES ARE EXEMPT FROM ALL HOURLY/DAY OF THE WEEK RESTRICTIONS:

· Drip Irrigation
· Soaker Hoses
· Hand Watering
· Food Gardens
· New installations of plants and turf (with a permit)
· Grey Water, Rainwater and AC Condensation Reuse
· Golf Course - Tee and Green Irrigation
· Plants for sale, resale, or installation

Please be aware that water restrictions are subject to change.

For more information and additional exemptions please contact your county’s water conservation department.

Helpful information online:

Find My Local Extension Office
Pest Management Handbook
SE Ornamental Horticulture Production & IPM Blog
Bugwood – Pest Images

Georgia Turf
Pesticide Applicator Info
Georgia Certified Landscape Professional
Landscape Alerts Online

Upcoming Trainings
Free Online Webinars
Georgia Certified Plant Professional
Extension Publications

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Mission Statement

The UGA Athens-Clarke County Extension’s mission is to respond to the people’s needs and interest in Agriculture, the Environment, Families, and 4-H/Youth in Athens-Clarke County with unbiased, research-based education and information.

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