

The Garden Bench for July & August

Gardening and home landscape information from UGA Cooperative Extension in Houston County.

Home Garden & Landscape Tips for Middle Georgia

Fire Ant Control

The fire ant 'two-step' should control 90% of fire ant beds in an area.

Step one - apply a fire ant bait over the entire area. Apply these each spring and fall when ants are out and looking for food.

Step two - treat remaining beds with a liquid insecticide mixture or powdered acephate (Orthene or other products). Insecticides to consider: bifenthrin, cyfluthrin, malathion, carbaryl etc.

An alternate method is to treat the entire area with fipronil (Over & Out granules). This chemical is advertised as giving up to one full season of control.

Fire ant baits and fipronil will also help control other ants like Argentine ants.

When using pesticides, read and follow all label directions!

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Coping with Dry Weather

Mulch is one of the best investments you can make! It keeps the soil moist and reduces weeds. Mulch 2 to 4 inches deep around trees and shrubs out to the edge of their canopy. Use deeper mulch depth with coarser textured mulches like bark and wood chip mulches. This helps retain moisture and improves the appearance of your landscape. Do not pile mulch against the stem.

***Newspapers make excellent mulch** around shrubs and flowers. Use a leaf rake to gently pull back the mulch you have now. Dip newspaper in a bucket of water and spread it two sheets thick over the ground. Then put the mulch back to hide the newspaper and hold it in place.

*** Get a rain gauge.** Most Georgia soils need only an inch of water per week. If it rains, subtract that amount from your total application.

*** Water between 10 p.m. and 10 a.m.** With nighttime watering, you lose less water to evaporation.

*** Don't wait until flowers, shrubs and trees wilt** to give them a drink of water. **Water early in the day to prevent plant stress.** This results in healthier plants . It is okay to let your lawn wilt slightly before you water

*** Use the "finger test"** to tell when your plants need water. **Poke your finger a few inches into the soil and see if it's moist.** If it is, don't water.

*** Drip or trickle irrigation** is a great way to water. Drip watering uses low pressure and puts the water at the root zone where it will do the

most good for the plant. Drip irrigation uses about one-third of the water a sprinkler uses. **Water no more often than once a week. On new plants, direct water to the root ball.**

*** Don't water** on hot, windy afternoons. You'll lose more than half of your water to evaporation.

*** Don't over fertilize or use herbicides on dry landscapes.** These require water to be active and can damage plants. Over fertilizing leads to a landscape that will be a water hog. A soil test from your Extension office will tell you how to fertilize your landscape.

Fruits & Nuts

*** Fertilize established figs** if they are watered.

*** Water fruit trees** once a week, when the soil dries out.

*** Apply mulch around fruit trees** but do not place it right up against the tree trunk as this creates a path for insects and disease.

*** Prevent disease** by promptly disposing of fallen fruit, leaves & dead limbs.

*** Continue using 'Home Orchard' or 'Home Fruit Tree' sprays** as needed.

Flowers & Shrubs

*** Remove faded flowers** from crape myrtles. Fertilize and water **to encourage a second bloom.** Be careful not to cut off newly emerging flowers.

*** Do not prune or fertilize spring flowering shrubs** like azalea, camellia, and viburnum after mid-July. It may interfere with next year's flowers. Keep them watered as mentioned above.

*** Watch for damaging insects on**

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shrubs like euonymus, azalea, camellia, pyracantha, holly, gardenia, & pittosporum. Scale, spider mites, lacebug and spittle bugs are here now.

* **Spray roses** for insects and disease as needed.

* Prune or “**dead-head**” **old flowers** off perennials and annuals. Fertilize annuals and perennials.

* **Plant or move irises and daylilies** beginning in late August.

* **Renew mulch** in flower beds for a fresh look..

* **Start seeds** of favorite biennials and other fall flowers in pots. Seedlings should be ready for transplanting in the fall.

* **The most important factors in success with container plants** may be fertilization and watering. Water when the top of the soil dries and apply enough water to run out the bottom of the pot. Add a controlled release fertilizer to the soil at planting and you may not need to fertilize again for months. You can use traditional granular fertilizers at planting, but expect to fertilize again in about 4 weeks. You can use a liquid fertilizer per label directions when it is time to re-fertilize.

Lawns & Turf

* The **most important practice for a healthy lawn** is to **keep it mowed at the right height**. Don't remove more than 1/3 the grass blade height at a mowing. **Check mower blades to ensure a sharp cut** that will not damage the lawn by tearing grass blades.

* **Do not fertilize lawns** if they will not be watered properly.

* **Water only when the lawn shows that it needs water**. Water deeply and wait until the lawn dries to water again. **Sample watering programs:** water twice a week with ¾ inch of water *or* water once a week with one inch of water each time. Do not water if you get enough rain.

Vegetables / Herbs

* **Herbs need well drained soil**. With regular watering they thrive in hot, dry environments. For best flavor/scent, **harvest in early morning**.

* **Keep vegetables harvested**, well watered and fertilized to continue production. If needed, fertilize every four weeks. Water twice a week with 3/4 inch of water. Mulch to control weeds and slow water loss.

* **Plant vegetables early enough** to allow time for them to mature before we receive a killing frost. Plant okra before July 1 and corn and eggplants by July 15. Before August 1, plant southern peas and winter squash. Plant tomatoes by August 10 and summer squash and snap beans by August 20. Plant cucumbers before September 1. Plant carrots Aug.20 – Sept. 15.

* **Start plants** for broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, and kale in a half-shaded area or in pots in August. **Get planting beds ready for**

September and October planting of these cool season vegetables.

Growing Grass in Shade

Trees and turf compete with one another for water, light and nutrients. It is generally best to replace turf under trees with mulched beds. Mulched beds are low maintenance and encourage good tree health.

If you want to try to grow grass under a tree, select a shade tolerant grass. St. Augustine grass is the most shade tolerant warm season grass. Zoysia is next in tolerance and centipede has intermediate shade tolerance. Bermuda grass has very poor tolerance to shade.

If an area gets less than four hours of sunlight per day, it is too shady for even a shade tolerant lawn grass to grow well. If your lawn has become thin under a mature tree and you still want to try to grow grass, consider thinning out the lower tree branches to allow as much light as possible to reach the grass. If several trees are in the area consider removing some of them to bring light to the area. Reduce the amount of nitrogen applied to grasses growing in shady areas. Maintain the soil pH, potassium and phosphorus levels as recommended by soil tests. Water infrequently but deeply and only when absolutely necessary. Raise the mowing height slightly, but keep it within the recommended height for that turf type.

Remember, the things we do to encourage the grass to grow under trees will often shorten the life of the tree. We can slowly kill our tree by trying to grow grass under the canopy. Decide if you are willing to sacrifice years of life from your tree by trying to grow grass under the tree's branches.

Web Page Links

Houston County Cooperative Extension
<http://www.ugaextension.com/houston>

Master Gardeners of Central Georgia
<http://www.mgcg.org>

UGA Cooperative Extension
<http://www.caes.uga.edu/extension/>

Gardening & Landscape Information
UGA Center for Urban Agriculture
www.gaurbanag.org



The University of Georgia

Call your local Extension
Office by dialing
(800) ASK-UGA1 from any
non-cell phone.