



Lowcountry Master Gardener Association

www.LowcountryMasterGardeners.org

A Garden Primer for Gardening in the South

Let's start at the very beginning. Where are we? Would you be surprised to learn that Seattle, Washington, Portland, Oregon and Beaufort, SC are all in the same USDA Horticultural Zone. 8b How can that be??

Our climate couldn't be more different than that of the Pacific Northwest. That's why the US Dept of Agriculture map is unreliable for much of the south. This map uses the number of frost days as their only criterion. It completely ignores the extremes of heat we experience for months and months in the South. Sure, some places in the rest of the US get even hotter than we do, but only for a few short days or weeks.

The Pacific Northwest is in the northern latitudes, and we're in the southern, --the cold of their winters is mitigated in their coastal areas by their warm maritime waters. But we have nothing to mitigate our relentless summer heat and humidity.

The USDA recently updated their Horticultural Zone Map, and it still places Coastal Beaufort County as Zone 8b, although our experience in gardening in the Lowcountry puts us in 9a most years. The plant label on a lilac, for example, might indicate it is hardy from Zones 3 to 8. Well, we all know that lilacs won't grow in the Lowcountry. Neither will peonies. We don't have the required frost days to allow them the dormancy they need to be able to return each year. Others, such as Lamb's Ears, don't require winter cold, but they simply melt away in our summer heat.

In 1997, The American Horticultural Society published a Heat Zone map, which when used in conjunction with the USDA map, will give you a better reference to what will survive in the Lowcountry.

Unfortunately, most plant labels use only the USDA map. So what are we to do??

Attached are some maps, and I'd like you to use your imagination to superimpose the American Horticultural Map over the Dept of Agriculture map, and you can see what a huge difference there is.

To garden successfully in the Lowcountry, you have to do your homework. There are several publications which address growing stuff in the south. If you don't have a copy of The Southern Living Garden Book, you should get one. It is the best publication on plants that I know of, and it which uses both the USDA and the AHS zones when describing the culture of plants for the south.

Another way that our two climates are different is the way our nights behave. In the Pacific Northwest, their summer nights are cool. Our summer nights maintain almost the same temperature as do the days. Sweltering and humid. That means that the plants don't get a respite from active growth and transpiring water. As a consequence, they need more fertilizer and more water. If you buy a time release fertilizer which says it is good for four months, don't believe it. It will be depleted in two. Even annuals that are purported to bloom all summer have begun to bloom themselves to death by midsummer and need to be pruned back and given an extra dose of fertilizer so they can remain in flower until season's end.

All that being said, we still need to know a little about the plants we decide to use.

Is it an ANNUAL OR A PERENNIAL?



Lowcountry Master Gardener Association

www.LowcountryMasterGardeners.org

The general definition of an ANNUAL is a plant which completes its entire lifecycle in one year. That is, it germinates, grows, goes to seed and dies all in one year.

A fellow Master Gardener told me that a perennial is a plant that comes back year after year.....if it lives!

So why plant an annual at all?? They just have to be replaced every year. It doesn't seem very practical. Or very economical. Wouldn't it make more sense to plant only perennials?

It's not impossible to have a flowering garden composed only of perennials; it can be done. However, you would need a keen sense of when flowering occurs on each plant because most perennials are short term bloomers. Some even disappear after blooming. You'd have to be prepared to have only parts of your garden in bloom at any one time.

Most perennials' bloom time is only in spring to early summer, some won't bloom until fall, a few bloom during summer and fewer still bloom in winter.

Also, perennials are far and away more expensive than most annuals. It takes the grower much more time to bring a perennial to flowering stage. It's said of perennials that they sleep the first year, creep the second, and leap the third.

Annuals have the advantage of being quick to bloom, and long bloom periods. Some flower from spring until they're cut down by frost. The mass plantings you see in commercial and civic landscaping are almost always annuals.

Annuals are classified as hardy and half hardy. You'll see this designation in seed catalogs and on seed packets. The seeds of Hardy annuals may be sown directly in the garden where they will germinate and come into flower quickly. Half hardy annuals are usually started indoors several weeks before the last frost date, and transplanted into the garden when the weather is reliably frost free.

There are a lot of plants which appear to be crossovers. Some annuals will behave like perennials in that once you plant them, they will come back year after year through self seeding. Some examples are cosmos, thithonia, zinnias and cleome.

And then there are some perennials which behave like annuals if they are grown outside their frost limit. These are known as tender perennials or sometimes as tropicals. If your garden is outside their limit, they must be protected in some fashion in the winter or brought indoors. Our lovely Gerber Daises are perennial here, but have to be treated as annuals only a zone away.

A biennial is a plant which bears foliage the first year, and blooms and dies in the second year. Most foxgloves, for example, are biennials. Many reseed, and if you to replant them for several consecutive years, you'll have a yearly supply of blooming plants.

You've heard some plants referred to as Cultivars. A plant cultivar may be likened to a pure breed dog. All dogs are canines, but pure breeds have been selectively bred within the species to reproduce certain characteristics and are given a specific name, i.e. Collie. Plant cultivars are so named as short for CULTivated VARIety. A cultivar may be a result of selective breeding, by humans, of plants in the same species to reproduce desirable characteristics such as



Lowcountry Master Gardener Association

www.LowcountryMasterGardeners.org

color or size of bloom and are usually given a name in addition to the genus and species...For example, *Lonicera sempervirens* 'Alabama Crimson' or *Hydrangea aborescens* 'Annabelle'.

Too, some cultivars have been discovered growing in isolation in the wild.

Cultivars will usually come true from seed for the first year or so, but in time will revert to species type unless they are isolated from others of their species.

A hybrid is a result of cross breeding or cross pollination between two genetically different plants and might be likened to breeding a horse to a donkey,--resulting in a mule. *Hucherella*, for example is a cross between *Huchera* and *Tiarella*. Placing an "x" before the hybrid's name seems declining in general usage once the public is accustomed to its name. In a sense, all hybrids are cultivars, i.e. they have been "cultivated" but not all cultivars are hybrids. Sort of like all Scotches are Whiskey, but not all Whiskies are Scotch!!

Hybrid plants are usually stronger and more vigorous than either parent. Today, other than heirloom varieties, most tomatoes are hybrids, but a different kind of hybrid. Hybrid tomatoes are created by breeders who hand pollinate two desirable named cultivars,--not to get a plant, but to get seeds which hopefully have the best of both cultivars. This process must be repeated with each generation. That's why seeds of hybrids tomatoes are a lot more expensive. Hybrid ornamentals are usually purchased as plants.

We're not going to go into F1 or F2 hybrids, but do be aware that seeds collected from hybrids don't come "true" so it is generally a waste of time to save them.

Within the world of perennials, there are two subcategories; herbaceous and woody. The top growth of herbaceous perennials will die down at the end of the season, and come back from the roots the following year. So be mindful where you dig in the spring that you don't destroy a sleeping plant. If I'm unsure that I will be able to locate a sleeping herbaceous perennial next spring, I use a wooden bamboo skewer from the supermarket to mark the spot. It's unobtrusive and inexpensive.

Woody perennials (such as trees or shrubs) have a woody outer layer protecting the vascular system of the plant from winter cold. Even though some may appear dead in the winter, such as *Hydrangeas* and *Lantanas*, these dry and desiccated looking branches will burst forth with green growth at the onset of warm weather. So be careful how you prune, or you might be cutting off next year's flower buds.

We spoke earlier about plants that self seed readily and will reliably germinate the following year. A lot of plants will self seed, even in the same growing season, but often they are so late to emerge that they are cut down by frost before they're mature enough to flower. Moon Vines are a good example.

So now that we know what kinds of plants there are and which will thrive in the Lowcountry, there are few hard and fast rules for planning your own garden,-- it is your garden, after all.

But there are guidelines which will lead you to having maximum satisfaction with minimal work. Our Master Gardener motto is: Right Plant – Right Place. But I'd like to carry that a bit farther. Right Plant, Right Place in the First Place. If a plant must be pruned yearly to keep it the size you want,--it's the wrong plant. You have made a lifetime commitment to this plant to prune it to keep it in check.



Lowcountry Master Gardener Association

www.LowcountryMasterGardeners.org

Before you plant a single plant in your garden, consider what its mature size will be and what it needs to thrive. This is particularly important in choosing shrubs and trees for landscape use. If you purchase a 4' shrub because it is the perfect size for in front of your picture window, you need to make sure that five or ten years from now, it will still be 4' high. The reason why this rule is so important for trees and shrubs is that by the time you realize you've made a bad choice, they've established themselves and removal is traumatic to you and the plant and it's expensive.

Full sun, part sun, part shade, shade. What on earth do they mean? Sun and shade designations are pretty clear cut. But when does part sun turn into part shade. This is pretty blurry. I take it to mean that part sun means dappled sun, or full sun with protection from the hottest afternoon sun.

Part Shade means bright light but no direct sun.

If you plant a Mediterranean such as Lavender in constantly moist fertile soil, you've planted the wrong plant there. It needs to be planted in relatively lean, well drained soil.

You may love the way the spikey silvery foliage of lavender complements the broad green leaves of acanthus, but they don't make good bedfellows. They have different cultural requirements. Make sure the plants you group together have reasonably similar requirements.

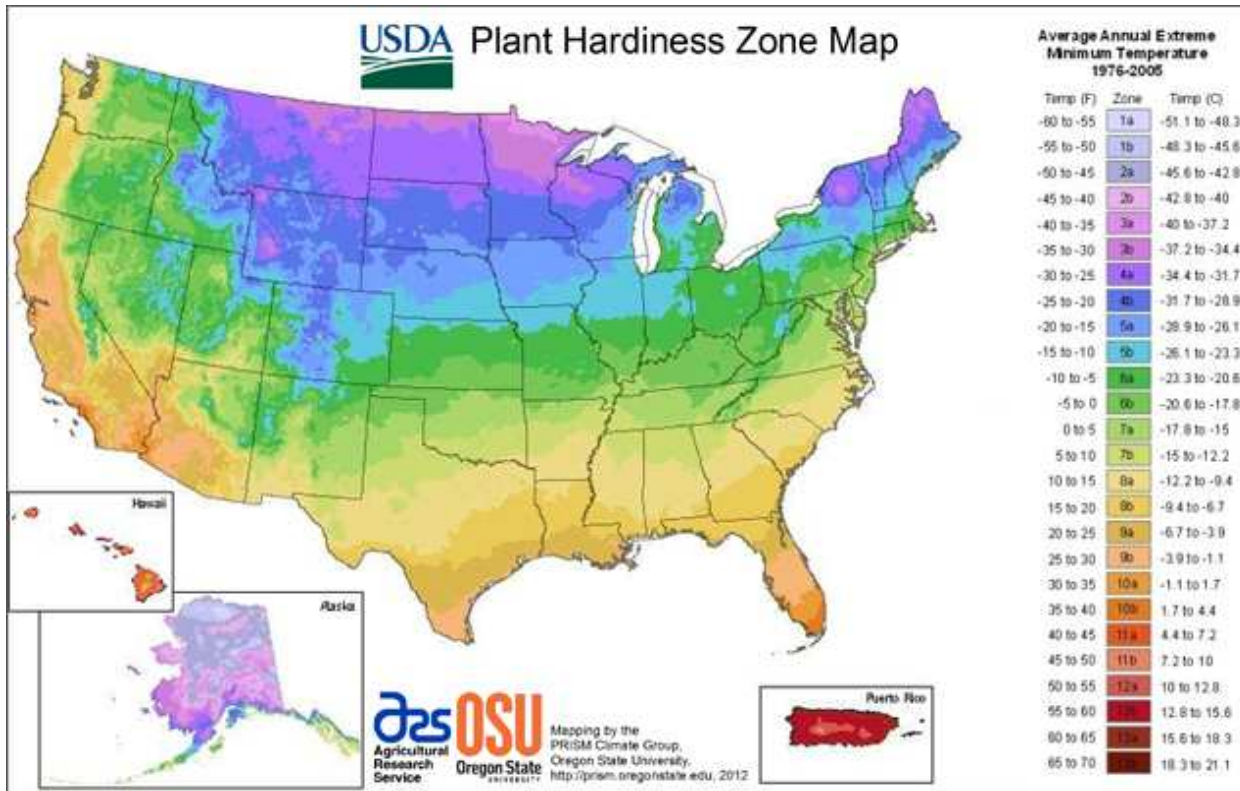
Bearing in mind that there is a plant out there that will make a liar out of you, a good observation about light requirements is that ornamental plants with large leaves usually need less sun.

Remember.....Every plant in your garden has cost someone's time, money or labor. So get to know them. Give them what they need and they'll give you what you expect from them.



Lowcountry Master Gardener Association

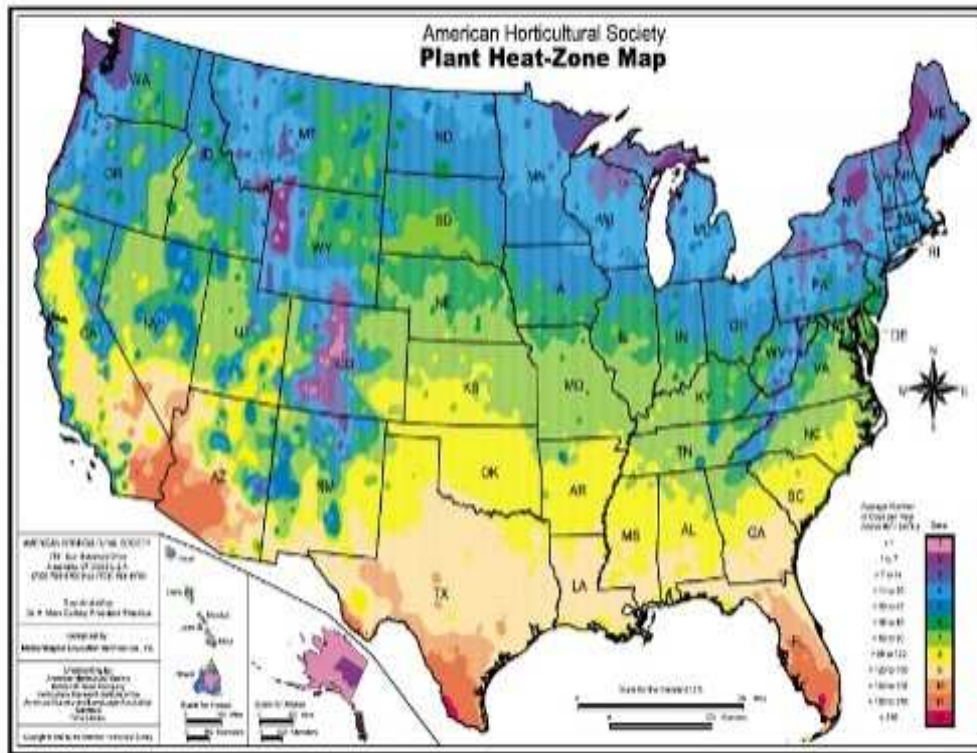
www.LowcountryMasterGardeners.org





Lowcountry Master Gardener Association

www.LowcountryMasterGardeners.org



Southern Living Zones

SL ZONE	USDA ZONE	LOW TEMPS	EXAMPLE CITIES
Upper South	zone 6	-10 to 0 degrees minimum	Baltimore, Charleston WV, Louisville
Middle South	upper region of zone 7	0 to 5 degrees minimum	Washington DC, Chattanooga, Memphis, Little Rock
Lower South	lower region of zone 7 and upper region of zone 8	5 to 15 degrees minimum	Raleigh, Atlanta, Birmingham, Jackson MS, Dallas



Lowcountry Master Gardener Association

www.LowcountryMasterGardeners.org

Coastal South	lower zone 8 and upper zone 9	15 to 25 degrees minimum	Charleston SC, Tallahassee, Baton Rouge, Houston
Tropical South	lower zone 9 and all of zone 10	25 to 40 degrees minimum	Miami; Brownsville TX

Based on all three maps, most of Beaufort County, South Carolina is in:

USDA Zone **8B**
American Horticultural Society Heat Zone **9**
Southern Living Cultural Zone **Coastal South**

The Southern Living Cultural Zone map can be found only in Southern Living publications.

Lunch and Learn 2013 Presentation