

LOWCOUNTRY BASICS

Right Plant – Right Place

Before introducing new plants into your landscape, do your homework and determine their height and spread at maturity. Allow plenty of room for growth. This is crucial when selecting foundation plants. Plant far enough away from the home to be able to walk between the mature shrub and your home.

Group plants with similar cultural requirements together. Ferns would not make good bed fellows for herbs, for example.

When planning a hedge, it is better to use a “tapestry” of different shrubs so that replacement in the event of a specimen’s failure will not be so noticeable.

Soil Prep

Before introducing new plantings to any area, it is very important to prepare the area properly. Any area you prepare for planting or transplanting will benefit from the addition of organic materials such as compost (your own or commercial), manure, and soil conditioner. In our area this is an on-going, year round endeavor in order to keep your soil in good tilth. Adding organic materials will improve the nutrient level of your soil. Work the amendments directly into the soil in new beds you create before attempting to add plants. Cultivating the soil and adding organic material such as compost will improve the tilth of the soil, enabling water and air to reach plant **roots**. Adding compost

regularly to your beds should provide enough nutrients to maintain growth. For existing shrubs consider side dressing the current plantings. Spread a light layer of compost around to the drip line of the plants (before putting down new mulch). This application will help to hold water and slowly release nutrients that will help the plants thrive. In already existing beds you can mix the soil you remove for a new planting with the organic amendments, return some of that to the hole and pack well. Use the rest of the mixture to backfill around the new plant.

Planting/Transplanting:

The best times for planting trees and shrubs are spring and fall, though fall planting gives time for a good root system to form before the plant is required to devote energy to top growth.

Transplanting: Before you dig the tree or shrub for transplanting, it is good to “root prune” the plant before moving. This is simply pushing a sharp spade down into the soil in a circle the size of the root ball you want, several weeks before moving. During this time, the plant will make many new rootlets which will help the plant get established in its new home.

If the root ball is large, roll it onto a heavy tarp as it is removed, and slide the tarp to the new hole. This will help you move heavy plants without unnecessary root disturbance. Have the new hole

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Planting & Transplanting (Contd)

dug and ready before you begin to move the plant.

- Dig the hole at least twice as wide as the root ball, *but no deeper*. You want the root flare to be even with or a little above the soil line (the root flare is where the tree begins to make roots). The plant will settle with time. Check potted or balled and burlapped plants carefully. Often, the root flare is several inches below the soil line. It's important that this excess soil be removed before planting.
- If the roots of the new plant are pot bound or circling the pot, pull them apart and spread them into the new hole, backfill with the amended soil mixture, making sure there are no air pockets, and water in well.
- Be sure to tamp down the soil around the planting as you backfill. Check after a few weeks and tamp down again if necessary. Keep the new plantings well watered (even daily if necessary) until they are established. After that, a normal watering and fertilizing routine should be sufficient.
- Mulch well, but never allow the mulch to rest against stems or trunks.

Mulch:

Proper mulching is an essential part of successful gardening in the Lowcountry. It insulates the soil,

helps suppress weeds, aids in water retention, and prevents splash up of water onto the plants.

The depth of mulch applied depends on the texture and density of the mulch. Many wood and bark mulches are composed of fine particles and should not be more than two to three inches deep after settling. Excessive amounts of fine-textured mulches around shallow-rooted plants can suffocate their roots causing yellowing of foliage and poor growth. Coarse-textured mulches such as pine needles and pine bark nuggets allow good air movement through them. Keep the mulch from touching stems or trunks. Constantly moist stems or trunks create a sympathetic environment for diseases or borer insects to enter the plant.

Irrigation:

The water needs of most *established* turf and plants are met by 1" of water per week. This is a starting point – some plants may take more, others may require less. The amount of water required by any plant will vary with type of plant, stage of plant growth, climate, and time of year.

The 1" rule is subject to several factors, however. In our humid climate, even an inch of water per week can be too much; particularly for areas which have overhead tree canopies, are shaded by buildings or have poor drainage. It is not uncommon for sandy soil, which

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Irrigation (Continued)

normally drains well, to have a sub-stratum of clay. Adjust your irrigation schedule throughout the year to match the varying water needs of the landscape as climate or seasonal conditions change.

It is far better to irrigate twice a week for a half hour than to water four times a week for fifteen minutes. Frequent, shallow irrigation is the most common watering mistake. It encourages roots to migrate to the surface instead of reaching down into the soil. This also creates turf and plants that become heavily water dependant. It's bad for the environment and for your utility bills. Additionally, watering so much that the soil is constantly waterlogged prevents oxygen from reaching roots. Eventually, oxygen starved roots will just decay and die and the plants or turf they support will succumb. If there is adequate rainfall, you do not need to add water through irrigation. Irrigate only when you see a need to do so.

If your irrigation system is not equipped with a functioning "rain gauge", which stops automatic irrigation when sufficient rain has fallen, we strongly suggest that one is installed and checked regularly for operation.

Actually, the best method of irrigation is not to rely on automatic irrigation at all, but to irrigate only when turf or plants

show that they need water. If walking across your lawn leaves visible footprints, it is evidence that water is needed. Drooping leaves on trees and shrubs in the *morning or evening* also indicate a need for water. Even plants with sufficient hydration often droop in mid day heat

Pruning:

Pruning needn't be difficult or complicated. As a refresher on the basic principles of pruning, you may want to read Clemson's information sheet on pruning shrubs.

<http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/plants/landscape/shrubs/hgic1053.html>. This gives a good basic review of pruning and is very informative. The information sheet even has a listing that tells you when to prune various types of shrubs.

The best time to prune is dependent on a number of factors – the most important of which is when it blooms. Plants that bloom in early spring (before June) "set" their flower buds on twigs that grew the previous summer. Fall and winter pruning removes the flower buds. These spring-flowering plants should be pruned in the spring or early summer, after their blooms are spent. Other plants bloom on the current season's growth and may be pruned in the fall or early winter without affecting the next season's floral display. Removal of dead or damaged wood should always be

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Pruning (Continued)

done immediately regardless of the season.

Avoid pruning with hedge clippers since this practice encourages outer growth at the expense of the health and inner growth of shrubs.

Basically, to control size, one needs to remove the tallest branches own to the base of the plant. Remove no more than 1/3 of these each year. New growth will then be encouraged from the base of the plant, making the shrub fuller. In a few years, you will have a fuller and healthier shrub, growing in its natural form. This is particularly important in flowering shrubs since hedging severely limits flower production.

A word about fertilizer in the Lowcountry.

Because our summer nights remain almost as hot and muggy as the days, plants don't have a chance to "rest". They transpire water and take up the nutrients in the soil 24 hours a day. As a consequence, their need for fertilizer is greater than usually recommended on package labels. During active growth, apply fertilizer at the recommended rates, but apply more often. If the label says an application will last for an entire season, it won't. Not in the Lowcountry. Many flowering plants benefit from a mid summer haircut and fertilizer boost. An occasional foliar feeding of water soluble fertilizer such as Peter's or Miracle Grow from a hose end

applicator will revive tired flowering plants.

Deer Resistance

When hungry enough, deer will eat almost anything. There is much information available about deer resistant plants, but the only absolutely certain way to prevent browsing by deer is to erect a tall fence.

As a rule, deer dislike plants that are highly aromatic or with hairy or velvety foliage. Native plants are **not** more deer resistant than any others. A list of plants rated as to their deer resistance may be obtained at:

<http://njaes.rutgers.edu/deerresistance/>

There are new systemic products (*Natura* and *Repellex*) on the market in tablet form, which, when buried next to plants, cause the plant to become unpalatable to deer. They might nibble new growth, but it is unlikely that the entire plant will be demolished.

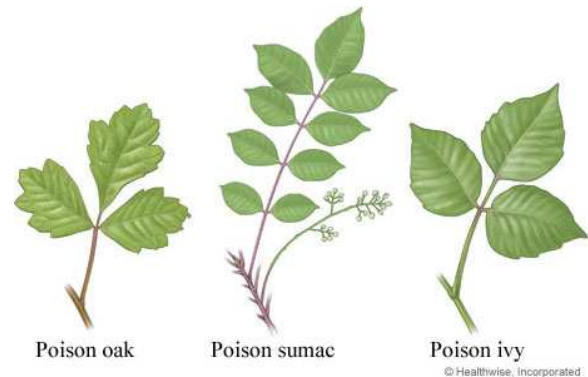
Since deer are particularly fond of new, tender growth, protection with plastic mesh or cages until the shrub or tree is mature enough so that new growth is out of reach is often successful.

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Hazard Warnings

You must take precautions to protect yourself from poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac, and toxic insects such as chiggers, mosquitoes, fire ants and no-see-ums. Chiggers favor tall grass, weeds and debris. No-see-ums live in any kind of vegetation. No-see-ums are particularly adept at climbing up pant legs, so don't forget to spray repellent along hems. All biting insects love hot weather. Insect repellent, gloves and long sleeves are always a good idea. Never wear open shoes while working in the garden or walk barefoot in turf. If you are bitten or touch poisonous plants, wash the area immediately with soap and warm water. Common household ammonia helps take the sting away. If you have an allergic reaction, get to the hospital immediately.

Poison Ivy, Oak, and Sumac Leaves



Always use long handled rakes when removing debris from under shrubbery. We do have poisonous snakes in the Lowcountry. When disturbed, they will usually attempt to get away from the source of disturbance. They are rarely confrontational unless cornered.

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BUGS THAT BITE IN BEAUFORT

Rodents, reptiles, animals and insects.....all of them can be dangerous. But the most prevalent and annoying are the insects. Their bites are not only annoying and painful; they can actually cause death in allergic people.

Some of them are so tiny that they can barely be seen by the naked eye. Special window and porch screens are required to protect against No-See-Ems. Some bugs are flyers, some are jumpers and some are crawlers. Even the best environmental practices (eliminate standing water, brush piles, etc.) can't protect against all of them. Here are some tips that will help:

- Wear protective clothing when gardening. Long sleeves, long pants, closed shoes, hats and gloves. They can even sneak up pant legs and sleeves, so tuck pants into boots, and wear cuffed sleeves.
- Wear insect repellent. Spray the inside and brims of hats. Especially sensitive people should even spray their clothing as some insects even bite through cloth.
- Insects are the most active in areas where there is no direct sunlight. Even passing clouds can cause enough shade to attract flyers. Early morning, late afternoon and overcast days are insect's favorites. Yet

we are told that those are the best times to be outside gardening during the summer!

- Be vigilant! Watch where you step. Stepping on a Fireant mound is an experience you don't want to have. Agitate shrubs and bushy perennials with a rake before sticking your hand under them. Most reptiles and rodents will skedaddle.
- Chiggers lurk in tall grass, leaf fall and mulch, so most bites are on ankles and legs. Protect yourself with boots, long pants and long socks. Ticks are jumpers and can lurk in any vegetation. See this website for the proper way to remove a tick.

<http://www.webmd.com/first-aid/tc/how-to-remove-a-tick-overview?page=2>

Check this excellent website for pictures of **bugs** and their **bites** and what do you when you're **bitten**.

<http://www.webmd.com/allergies/ss/slideshow-bad-bugs>