



Lowcountry Master Gardener Association

www.LowcountryMasterGardeners.org

LOWCOUNTRY BASICS

Soil Preparation:

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 beds, consider side dressing the current plantings. Simply mix compost, commercial manure, and peat. Spread a light layer around 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 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.



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Transplanting..... Continued

- 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 amount of mulch to apply 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. Adjust your irrigation schedule throughout the year to match the varying water needs of the landscape as climate/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



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Irrigation..... Continued

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.

Pruning:

Pruning doesn't have to 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 a particular plant 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" or form 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 done immediately regardless of the season.

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 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 Miracle Gro or Peter's, from a hose end applicator will revive tired flowering plants.



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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 no more deer resistant than any others. A list of plants rated as to their deer resistance may be obtained at:

<http://naes.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.