



## Lawnmower Maintenance

Whether you live in the city, the suburbs, or in the country, there is a good chance you own a lawnmower. While lawnmowers do require regular upkeep, fortunately most steps can be completed easily. This should be done by carefully following maintenance instructions found in the lawn mower service manual. Here are some commonly recommended steps to provide routine lawnmower maintenance.



Sharp lawnmower blades cut the grass evenly, while dull blades tear it and leave a ragged lawn. A quality cut helps prevent disease and insect damage and produces a more attractive appearance. Most blades can be sharpened several times before blade replacement is necessary. How often the blade should be sharpened will depend on use, but once before the growing season and once a month during is generally adequate. The blade should be replaced if the corners of the blade are rounded off or if the cutting ends of the blade are thin.

Periodic oil changes are necessary throughout the mower's duration. For the average homeowner an oil change is essential about once a year, though it should be done more often in dusty conditions or if it takes over an hour to mow. When adding oil, make sure to only refill to the marked area on the dipstick as too much can be harmful to the engine.

As the mower is used, dust particles and grass clippings attach to the air filter. An unclean air filter reduces the amount of air available for combustion. Clean newer air filters and replace them once they become too worn. How often the air filter will need service depends on the dustiness of the mowing area.

Electricity from the spark plug is needed for the engine to start, with spark plug replacement typically required after 100 hours of use. The best time to inspect your spark plug is at the end of the season. If the plug tip or electrode is worn or burned, or if the threads are rusty, the plug should be replaced.

Keeping your mower clean is one of the best things you can do as moisture from leftover grass clippings will lead to rusting over time. Use a brush or blower to remove these clippings, making sure to check the mower carefully for easy to miss areas.

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## Leafy Greens Grown in Raised Beds

I recently visited Buds and Blooms Nursery in Wesson, Mississippi, where they were growing some gorgeous leafy greens in raised beds.

Raised beds are ideal for cool-season vegetables because they offer improved drainage, help prevent soil compaction and warm up faster in the cooler months. This creates an optimal environment for root development and helps prevent waterlogging, which is crucial for healthy plant growth.

The Chinese cabbage growing at Buds and Blooms is a standout.

This plant prefers rich, well-drained soil with a slightly acidic to neutral pH of 6.0-7.0. It thrives in cooler temperatures between 45 and 75 degrees. For best results, plant Chinese cabbage in a location that receives full sun to partial shade, and make sure it gets consistent moisture. Dry conditions can cause the plant to bolt.

Bolting is when a crop prematurely grows flower stalks and produces seeds. The result is inedible, bitter-tasting leaves or poor-quality produce.

Chinese cabbage can be direct-seeded or transplanted into the garden, and it matures in 70-85 days. The lush green leaves are not only beautiful but packed with nutrients. This makes them perfect for fresh salads, stir-fries or fermenting into kimchi.

The Chioggia Guardsmark beets grown in the raised beds at Buds and Blooms are another fantastic cool-season crop.

These heirloom beets prefer well-drained, loose soil rich in organic matter. They grow best in temperatures between 50 and 65 degrees.

Chioggia Guardsmark beet seeds can be sown directly into the garden as soon as the soil can be worked in early fall or spring. Space seeds about 1 inch apart, and thin the seedlings to 3-4 inches apart once they emerge to give the roots plenty of room to develop.

Chioggia Guardsmark beets produce striking roots with pink and white rings and edible, bright green leaves with burgundy-red veins. These leaves can be harvested throughout the growing season and used in salads or sautéed like Swiss chard. The roots are ready to harvest in 55-65 days.

At Buds and Blooms, I loved the Dinosaur kale they had growing in raised beds. This variety is one of the best for overwintering. This hardy green thrives in well-drained, loamy soil with a pH between 6.0 and 7.5.

Dinosaur kale prefers full sun but can tolerate partial shade, especially in warmer areas. It is incredibly cold-tolerant, even surviving temperatures down to 20 degrees when given some frost protection.

Sow seeds about one-fourth to one-half inch deep, spacing them 12 to 18 inches apart for full-size plants. This variety can be grown year-round in milder climates, with leaves ready for harvest in about 60 days.

The dark blue-green, wrinkled leaves have a tender texture and a slightly sweet, earthy flavor, making them a popular choice for both fresh salads and cooking. Its tall, upright growth habit -- reaching 2-3 feet tall -- makes kale an attractive addition to edible landscapes and ornamental gardens alike.

When growing these cool-season vegetables in raised beds, I recommend watering regularly, especially during dry spells. Feed plants with a balanced, organic fertilizer to ensure they receive the nutrients needed for vigorous growth.

By incorporating cool-season leafy green vegetables into your garden, you can enjoy fresh, home-grown produce even during the winter months.



# Garden Calendar: December

Now is the time of year that Cabin Fever and garden catalogs in our mailboxes get us dreaming about getting out into the garden.

## Planning

- Start plans on paper for changes or improvements in the garden.
- Order seed for early planting.

## Equipment

- Repair and sharpen mowers and tools. Order new pots and markers.
- Check condition of sprayers.

## Planting

- Set out trees and shrubs.
- Plant Sweet Peas, Poppies, and Larkspur.

## Fertilizing

- January - March is the proper time to fertilize trees and shrubs.
- Apply lime to lawns if needed.

## Pest Control

- Scale on broad-leaf evergreens should be sprayed with dormant oil for control.

## Pruning

- Trim Nandinas.

## Mulch

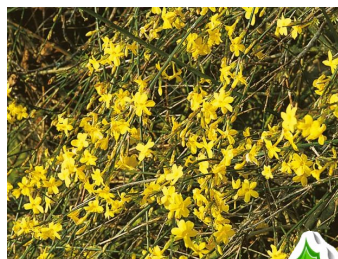
- Mulch Lilies with compost.
- Protect tender plants during periods of extreme cold.

## Miscellaneous

- Keep bird feeders stocked. Provide water for birds.
- After freeze, check to make sure plants have not heaved out of the ground.

## In Bloom

- Camellia, Winter Honeysuckle, Winter Jasmine, and in mild winters Flowering Quince





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## Caring for Real Christmas Trees

It's probably hard to imagine a real tree is less of a fire risk than an artificial tree but when properly cared for that is indeed the case.

While some tree species are suited to growing in our climatic conditions, some are not so they will only be available as pre-cut trees. Choosing, cutting, and bringing home a real Christmas tree is a fun, family tradition that makes memories to last a lifetime. If you choose a pine, spruce, fir or juniper variety, they will make your house smell like Christmas, too! That's a quality you don't get with an artificial tree. Leyland cypress however, is not aromatic.



If you and your family plan to have a real tree this year, be sure to observe some safety rules:

- Put the tree in water as soon as you get home.
- Make a fresh cut and remove at least 1 inch from the base of the trunk before placing it in the tree stand.
- Use a tree stand that holds 1-2 gallons of water. The tree needs 1 quart of water per inch of diameter. Fill the stand daily, checking the water level several times a day. Trees will use up to 2 gallons of water a day, especially the first few days.

Use the USDA fire-retardant solution below for an even safer holiday.

- ◇ 2 gals. of hot water
  - ◇ 2 cups Karo syrup (corn syrup)
  - ◇ 2 oz. liquid bleach
  - ◇ 2 '2-finger' pinches Epsom salts
  - ◇ 1/2 cup borax (20 Mule Team is a popular brand)
  - ◇ 1 tsp. chelated iron (available at garden shops)
- 
- Keep the tree out of direct sunlight and blinds closed during the day.
  - Keep tree away from heat sources, such as fireplaces, heaters, and stoves.
  - Decorate your tree with LED or mini lights. Inspect used decorative lights to make sure wires are in good condition with no cracks or frays.
  - Be sure to unplug decorative lights before leaving the house or going to bed.

Buying your tree from a local Christmas tree farm is a great way to support the local and state economy. Visit the Southern Christmas Tree Association website ([southernchristmastrees.org](http://southernchristmastrees.org)) for a list of growers that may be local to you or contact your county Extension office.

If you don't live near a Christmas tree farm, you can find real trees at many different retailers. When buying one of these trees, be sure the tree is not already dried out. Dropped needles at the base of the tree is a good sign the tree is already dry. Another way to tell is to grab a branch and pull your hand toward yourself. If the needles come off, the tree is dry. You can also bend a twig to see if it snaps. The fresher the better!

Wishing every one a Merry Christmas and safe holiday season!



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## Choosing Color For Your Landscape

Color is the most rewarding, yet challenging, element to work with in the landscape and is among the last considerations in the landscape design process. Visually, colors in the landscape can impact our emotions and psychology.

Red and yellow are known as 'warm' colors and are among the strongest hues in the landscape. These colors are often associated with danger and caution respectively. Warm season colors can easily catch one's eye and become a focal point so these colors must be planted wisely in the landscape. These colors are best planted in areas where you want more focus, such as an entrance.



Conversely, blue and green are 'cool' colors and can cause more passive, relaxed feelings. Cool colors are just as important as warm colors. In fact, warm colors are not as effective as when balanced nearby or behind with blues and greens. Since cool colors recede they offer a valuable service of making a small landscape look larger.

Color can be utilized in the garden for the following effects:

- To bring life and excitement to the landscape
- Accent important areas that you want noticed (for example the front door)
- Blend the exterior environment with structural colors to tie the overall design
- Complement the colors of other plants
- Attract animals and insects, such as birds and butterflies
- Create a mood
- Balance bed and landscape designs
- Provide variety and interest through the seasons



Give some thought to flower color combinations when planning a bed layout and use a color wheel as a guide. The primary colors on a color wheel are red, yellow, and blue; all other colors on the color wheel are derived from mixing primary colors. Placing primary flower colors next to each other in a design produces a strong contrast that may not be pleasing. Make transitions using shades and tints of primary colors. Shades are darker than the primary color and tints are lighter. There are color combinations that have been developed that are pleasing to the eye.

A monochromatic scheme uses one color combined with shades and tints of that same color. Supplement this scheme with white flowers or plants with silver or gray foliage. White, gray, or silver matches almost any color scheme.

An analogous color scheme uses any two colors adjacent to each other on the color wheel, such as yellow and yellow-green or yellow and yellow-orange.

Complementary colors are any two colors across from each other on the color wheel, such as yellow and blue or red and green. It often works well to make one of the two complementary colors dominant and use the other as an accent.

How does one begin to choose colors for a garden? Context plays an important role in the success of a garden design. Environmental influences, color schemes that are predominant in the neighborhood, and the color of your house or other site features can all play a strong role in color choice.



# Private Applicator Certification Training

The Mississippi Pesticide Safety Education Program has updated its online and face-to-face certification programs to meet this demand. The new mandated training and competency requirements from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are for applicators who use restricted use pesticides on farmland and need to renew or obtain certification.

The new trainings are designed to provide increased public health and safety benefits by raising safety standards to be consistent with commercial applicators. Trainings consist of video modules covering new safety, environmental protection and application procedures. These modules prepare applicators for the 55-question competency exam, which requires a score of at least 70%.

Mississippi's online and face-to-face certification programs are developed and delivered by the Mississippi State University Extension Service. For private pesticide applicator online training, visit <http://msuext.ms/dkp8h>. To learn about upcoming in-person trainings, visit <https://extension.msstate.edu/calendar> or contact your local Extension office. The new trainings cost \$60 per applicant.

The online private applicator training consists of video modules and an online proctored exam. While the video modules are accessible on mobile devices, the online exam will require a laptop or desktop computer, a webcam, adequate internet connection and valid photo identification. The online test will be proctored by the online proctoring system Honorlock. Alternatively, the private applicator exam can be taken either online or as a paper test at a local MSU Extension office.



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION

## Private Applicator

TRAINING AND TESTING ONLINE

Watch the training modules, pass the exam, and receive your private applicator certification from MDAC Bureau of Plant Industry.

# \$60 COST

Visit <http://msuext.ms/agmes> or contact your local MSU Extension office for info on how to register.

## 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Poinsettia Open House!!

Friday, December 6th  
1:00PM - 4:00PM

Saturday, December 7th  
10:00AM - 2:00PM

Holiday and Floral Demonstrations Both Days!

Come view 60 varieties of Poinsettias!

Take our survey and take home a plant!

Come Shop the Unique Gifts at  
The Crosby Arboretum Booth!

Bring the family! Holiday backdrops will be available for photos!

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# Specialty Crops Conference

Lake Terrace Convention Center  
Hattiesburg, MS

## December 12th 10AM - 3PM\*

Food as a Business Workshop Sessions

Market Outlets Opportunities, Marketing Considerations

Food Regulations, Labeling, Food Safety

Loans, Credit Readiness, Loan Programs

Digital Marketing & Social Media, State Agency Services/Programs

H-2A Temporary Agricultural Program



## December 13th 7:30AM - 4PM\*

Breakfast

Welcome & General Session

Keynote: Dr. Christian Stephenson

What is Organic Certification & Is It Right for My Farm?

Technical Programs

Fruit Crops, Vegetable Crops, Cut Flowers & Ornamental Horticulture

Vendor Market

\*Lunch and refreshments provided



**Registration Fee: FREE**  
**Pre-Registration Required**

Registration Deadline 12/2/24

<https://tinyurl.com/SCropsC>

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