

Gardening/Horticulture

Newsletter

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THINGS TO DO

- Continue to divide summer and fall blooming perennials.
- Plant cool season vegetables early this month.
- Plant warm season vegetables from mid month on. Don't be in a hurry, or you may have to replant.
- Keep mulch on hand for a possible late frost.
- Spray hybrid tea roses to prevent black spot. Spray according to label directions.
- Fertilize your bermuda or zoysiagrass lawn after it has fully greened up.
- Prune and fertilize spring blooming trees and shrubs immediately after bloom.
- As pansies play out, replace them with summer annuals.
- Use bird netting to keep birds away from strawberries. Watch for slugs.
- Watch for spider mites and bagworms.
- Begin setting summer bulbs in mid-month.
- As flowering bulbs fade, allow 6-8 weeks of green growing time for bulbs to replenish their nutrients. Crocus and daffodils do not have their flower heads removed, but it is beneficial with hyacinths and tulips. Fertilize with complete fertilizer.

WHY IS MY BLUE SPRUCE TREE UGLY?

Blue spruce is a beautiful tree that loves cool temperatures and high altitudes. Many people try to grow this Rocky Mountains native in Arkansas, but experts recommend against it.

One of the more common questions about blue spruce is, "Why do the needles turn color and fall off and twigs start to die back after a few years?"

According to Dr. Steve Vann, plant pathologist with the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, there may be many causes for the disease he calls ugly spruce syndrome. Poor soils, drought, poor drainage, drift from lawn weed-killers and certain insects can all cause needles and limbs to look bad.

But Vann says there are also common diseases of blue spruce that occur in Arkansas. Rhizosphaera needle cast is a fungal disease that causes spruce needles to turn color and fall off. Cytospora canker is another fungal disease that can infect limbs and cause them to "die back" as can another disease called Sirococcus shoot blight.

The first step in dealing with a blue spruce problem is to have it correctly diagnosed. You can have the Baxter County Extension office send a sample to UA Plant Disease Clinic for an analysis. The clinic will figure out what is wrong, based on the sample, and send back a recommendation for control. The clinic is free.

If a disease is the culprit, Vann recommends pruning out diseased limbs, within reason, then applying a fungicide containing chlorothalonil during periods of wet weather in the spring and summer. Weekly applications may be needed during unfavorable weather, especially to protect newly developed foliage. Large trees may make this approach impractical.

Also have the soil tested and fertilize according to the test results. Poor drainage should be corrected if possible, as well.

For new plantings, Vann advises staying away from blue spruce. It is not adapted very well to Arkansas. Many other trees will grow better and have fewer problems.

YOU CAN CONQUER COCKROACHES

One of the most feared and hated household pests in Arkansas is the lowly cockroach. Besides scaring the heck out of us, their habits and mobility make cockroaches well adapted for transmitting diseases.

Even the nicest homes can become infested with this pest.

Fortunately, they can be controlled with a little forethought.

Only five of the 3,500 known species in the world can be found in Arkansas, but that's five too many.

Here's the rundown of the Arkansas species:

- **German cockroach** - This most troublesome of the five cockroaches is light brown and about 5/8-inch long. It favors warm, dark areas of your home and uses small cracks and crevices to get into dark confined areas. It likes moist places near water and food.
- **Brown-banded cockroach** - Similar in size and color to the German cockroach, it prefers a warmer, drier environment than the German cockroach. It prefers high locations such as closet shelves, behind pictures, light fixtures, furniture and appliances.

- **American cockroach** - At 2 inches long, this is the largest roach species in Arkansas. This dark red or dark brown roach is occasionally found in homes. It's more commonly found in warm, moist areas of industrial or commercial buildings or sewers.
- **Oriental cockroach** - This dark colored roach is between the German and American cockroaches in size. It has a strong unpleasant odor and prefers cool, damp and dark areas. It's often called a water bug. Infestations are most common in spring and fall.
- **Wood cockroach** - This roach prefers the outdoors and usually is found around wood piles, dead trees or rotting logs. It's attracted to lights and occasionally enters homes. It has a white band that runs around the head and a shield behind the head. Usually, it does not survive or multiply indoors.

Keys to effective cockroach management are prevention/sanitation, detection and chemical control. Each step is critical.

Use weather stripping and caulking, around plumbing, and eliminate hiding places by caulking cracks and crevices in dark, moist areas.

Inspect items brought into homes, food containers, furniture, appliances and clothing for adults and eggs.

Don't allow food particles to accumulate in areas accessible to cockroaches.

Use cockroach traps in areas where cockroaches tend to concentrate. Place them against walls under sinks, in cabinets and in basement corners.

Cockroach insecticides include sprays, dusts and baits. Be sure to read the label for safety information.

Residual sprays usually can remain effective on a surface for two to four weeks. Apply to cracks and crevices where cockroaches hide and in area where they travel in search of food. Insecticide dusts can penetrate hiding places that other insecticides will not reach. They typically last longer than sprays.

Baits can be used in areas where you can't spray or dust. The most effective baits are bait stations or a gel.

Baits are effective and safe for the environment and people and pets. They have an attractant such as peanut butter or syrup and a slow-acting, but effective poison. Be patient, because baits take several weeks to get results.

Use baits that contain hydramethylnon, fipronil, boric acid or abamectin as the active ingredient. The active ingredient can be found on the label. Set bait in "hot spots."

If the situation is severe or it's unclear what to do, you should call a professional pest control service.

IT'S LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Location is just as important to gardeners as it is to real estate investors.

Locating your garden in the right location will keep you from a demoralizing experience and potential gardening failure.

Look for a convenient spot with full sunlight. Leafy vegetables tolerate partial shade, but vegetables producing fruits must be grown under full sunlight. Some shade from trees can be tolerated by vegetables. The shade is less dense and short-lived due to the movement of the sun.

As a general rule, locating a vegetable garden within 6 to 8 feet of the northern side of a one-story structure is a waste of time.

The south side is an ideal location with its full sunlight. Gardens close to the west or south side of low structures grow better vegetables because the structure radiates heat late in the day.

The east side receives the full early morning sun, but plant growth may be slower than on the west side where the afternoon sun raises the soil and air temperature.

High or swirling winds are destructive to young seedlings and mature plants with heavy fruits. Avoid planting tall and extended growing varieties in extremely windy areas. Build walls, fences and deflecting panels, which also reflect and intensify sunlight. Tree or shrub windbreaks are suitable for larger gardens where roots will not be in competition.

Fog can substantially modify the climate and affect plant growth especially in low-lying waterside communities and along coastal slopes.

Air movement can make certain areas of your garden susceptible to frost damage. The garden should not be too close to fences or air traps.

Set your garden on a hillside rather on a hilltop. Frost occurs in low areas while the hillside allows cold air to drain and warm air to rise past the garden site.

Proximity to the garden has a lot to do with prompt responses to garden chores including watering, weed control and harvesting. If possible, locate your garden within walking distance of your residence.

Poorly drained soil or flood areas could be manageable with the addition of plenty of organic matters and raised beds.

If you have a choice, locate your garden where it does not flood after heavy rain. Fruits and vegetables can only withstand brief periods of flooding.

BIRDS, INSECTS, AND "BUG LIGHTS" (By: Rex Roberg and Jerry W. Davis)

The following information, which appeared in the *Entomological News*, Vol. 107, No. 2, March and April, 1996, is still pertinent today.

Authors Timothy B. Frick, and Douglas W. Tallamy, with the Department of Entomology at the University of Delaware, published the paper titled "Density and Diversity of Nontarget Insects Killed by Suburban Electric Insect Traps." We know that "the bug light" has almost become a social icon and we make jokes about people being amused in the evenings by sitting on the front porch identifying the type of insect being killed by the sound of the electrical zapping that emanates from their bug lights. Over 1 million bug lights are sold each year and they last an average of 7 years. The paper provides some insight that birders, ecologists, and homeowners need to consider and reconsider. Traps are ineffective in reducing mosquito populations and other biting flies. The visible light put off by lamps are less attractive to mosquitoes and many species of mosquitoes are not attracted at all to light traps. Electric traps fail to reduce mosquito populations and mosquitoes that move toward the bug lights are rarely killed. The bug lights are effective in killing non-target insects at an estimated rate of about 350 billion per year. Many of these non-target insects are beneficial to us and in addition serve as a food source for many other types of wildlife. The study concluded that entomologists should be educating the public about the costs and lack of benefits from these gadgets.

For the record: Extension entomologists with the University of Arkansas, Cooperative Extension Service don't recommend the use of these "bug lights."

GROUND COVERS ADD TO LANDSCAPE

Ground covers such as trailing juniper, vinca minor, mondo grass and English ivy can be both a practical and beautiful addition to your landscape.

Ground covers can provide erosion control on steep slopes and serve as a lawn substitute in shady areas. They reduce mowing and edging, and they can often be used in areas too narrow for shrubs.

Besides being practical, ground covers add color and texture to your landscape.

Before planting a ground cover, prepare the land like you would for any other type of planting. Break the soil to a depth of 4 to 8 inches and add fertilizer and lime according to a current soil test recommendation.

If you don't have a soil test report—and you should have—you can apply 1 to 3 cups of a complete fertilizer such as 13-13-13 per 100 square feet.

Most soils need additional organic matter. A layer 1 to 3 inches deep is usually enough.

Ground covers do best when planted in early spring or fall, but they can be planted any time of the year if they're kept watered during hot, dry weather.

A mulch of fine bark or ground-up leaves will help keep the soil moist during dry weather and help control weeds while the ground cover is getting established.

Weeding is always a problem the first year or two, but ground covers are usually worth the trouble in the long run.

CREEPING PHLOX

There are 60 species of phlox distributed almost universally across North America. Many species, such as the spring blooming, *P. divaricata*, the Wild Sweet William, are common throughout the Arkansas woodlands and are grown occasionally in the wild garden. This tough, long-lived perennial is best when planted where it gets good winter drainage and full sun. It's often seen at the top of a garden wall where the dense leaves cascade down the wall's face. It roots freely along the stems and is easily propagated by division or cutting. The plant will compete with many plants, but tall, invasive weeds and bermudagrass must be kept at bay to keep creeping phlox growing long term. Cutting the plant back after flowering keeps the foliage dense and may result in a few new flowers. The plant is so tough; one species even grows in Siberia.

Creeping phlox is native to sandy soils in open woodlands along the Appalachian Mountain chain and up the Potomac Valley. It's a dense, low growing creeper reaching 4 to 6 inches tall with pink, rose, blue or white 1-inch flowers produced in mass in early spring. Individual plants remain in bloom for three weeks. In the Ozarks, the plant is often called "thrift," apparently because the color selections resemble the thrift of England.

For more information on any of the above topics, please feel free to contact me at the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension office at 425-2335.

Sincerely,

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County Extension Agent-
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Enc.