

The Carolina Country Garden

Gardeners, dig into the latest Carolina Country gardening guide. Spring is right around the corner and there's no time like the present to make plans for your most bountiful garden yet.

We've got a year's worth of seasonal tips from your favorite gardening guide, Hank Smith. Plus your stories about some off-the-wall plants you have to see, or smell, to believe (Potatoes that resemble Snoopy? Flowers that smell like rotten meat?). And support from Carolina Country advertisers.

Happy gardening!



Vegetable and flower images courtesy of W. Atlee Burpee & Co.

Thanks Hank for 22 Years of Gardening Advice



photo © Todd Gaul

Henry J. "Hank" Smith has advised Carolina Country gardeners since August 1983, making him the most senior of our contributors. He's not only out-

lasted everyone else, he's also maintained his popularity. "Hank's Gardening Guide" has been among the best-read pages of this magazine.

In December, Hank was injured in a fall at his retirement village and advised us later that he cannot continue his monthly column. Along with our readers, we will greatly miss hearing from him each month.

We've assembled here a collection of Hank's gardening tips for year-round reference. While he considers the variances among North Carolina's regions, Hank advises gardeners to pay attention to the seasonal conditions affecting their own gardens.

A Florida native, Hank Smith was a staff member at North Carolina State University's Horticultural Science Department before becoming a fulltime consultant. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees in horticultural science at the University of Florida. He served fellowships at Harvard and Penn State universities, worked as an Extension specialist at Mississippi State and was landscape editor for Southern Living magazine. He's hosted a weekly TV program, published many articles and photographs, and served as an advisor and officer to several horticultural societies.

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How Does *Your Garden* Grow?

by Hank Smith



Spring

MARCH | APRIL | MAY

Garden Vegetables and Fruits

- ☛ Most vegetables have "friends" with whom they grow and produce better. For example: Beans thrive when planted near beets, strawberries, corn, eggplant, squash, peas, tomatoes, carrots, radishes, potatoes and celery.
- ☛ Once established, perennial plants will provide a bountiful harvest every year for many years. Three that are easy to grow are asparagus, horseradish and rhubarb.
- ☛ Vegetables can be used as part of the flower garden. For example, carrots to edge a flowerbed (the foliage gives a fern-like edging); strawberries as a low-edging plant or groundcover; and cabbages backed with zinnias, with petunias in front.
- ☛ Sow or plant in warm weather: beans, carrots, squash, peppers, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, melons and tomatoes. Sow or plant in cool weather: beets, peas, radishes, broccoli, spinach, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, lettuce, parsley, spinach, swiss chard and turnips.
- ☛ Remove blooms from herbs to direct plant energy to produce foliage, not flowers.
- ☛ To grow your own pineapple, twist the top off of a pineapple, plant it in a pot of fertile soil, and then wait. Place the plant outside in the sun. Give it plenty of water. If the temperature drops below 45 degrees, bring the pot indoors. It takes about two years for the plant to yield an edible pineapple.

Trees and Shrubs

- ☛ The first spring is a critical time for newly-planted shrubs and trees. Water them deeply once or twice a week during dry periods.
- ☛ Balled-and-burlapped plants should have the ball of soil at least one-half as wide as the shrubs' top spread. If the ball of earth is quite small in comparison with the top, the shrub will have difficulty surviving the shock of transplanting.
- ☛ Remove faded blooms when they appear on bedding plants and shrubs.
- ☛ Trees like to be transplanted before the end of March. In mid-and-upper South, April is satisfactory.
- ☛ Trees require good soil drainage. Poor results usually follow if water stands for a long period after a heavy rain.

Flowers

- ☛ Good bedding plants for bright sunny spots: portulaca, zinnia, marigold, salvia and celosia.
- ☛ The best and easiest to grow of the flowering perennial vines include: hybrid clematis, autumn clematis, silver-lace vine, honeysuckle, wisteria and trumpet creeper.

☞ Plant masses of zinnias, marigolds and petunias. These popular annuals contribute summer-long color accents.

☞ Close cousin of morning glory vines, moon vine (*Calonyction aculeatum*) produces creamy-white blooms that open at sunset and remain until daybreak. Growing 10–15 feet in height, vines need full sun and rich soil.

Lawn

☞ Conditioners improve soil by increasing moisture and fertilizer holding capacity. They also absorb air and water. Organic materials that can be used as soil conditioners include old sawdust, cotton gin waste, peanut hulls and sewer sludge.

☞ Fertilizer and lime should be added on the basis of a soil test. Your local county extension office offers information on the soil test and grass varieties.

☞ No matter what type of grass you choose, successful growth depends largely on soil preparation. Level and grade the area to be planted. Fill in low places and slope lawn away from the house to prevent future moisture problems in the house's foundation that can occur after heavy rains. After leveling, add and mix soil conditioners and fertilizers.

☞ Make sure the mower blade is sharp before the first mowing. A sharp blade cuts clean and doesn't tear the grass tips.

☞ Put grass seed in the refrigerator overnight before planting. This cuts the germination time in half.

☞ The average lawn needs about one inch of water per week to stay healthy. If there is less than an inch of rain, use sprinklers to make up the difference. Always water deeply, as a light sprinkling can do more harm than good.

Treatments

☞ Five tablespoons of bleach in a gallon of water, shaken well, will help prolong the life of cut flowers. Keep the vase full of solution.

☞ To attract hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies, plant bee balm in flowerbeds.

☞ To keep mosquitoes from outdoor sitting areas, plant marigolds nearby.

Indoors

☞ Water-retaining polymers added to soil when planting potted plants will help hold moisture.

☞ Spider plants are well adapted to hanging baskets in partial shade.



Summer

JUNE | JULY | AUG

Garden Vegetables and Fruits

☞ Green beans are a good temporary groundcover, easy to eliminate when a permanent use of soil takes place. They also enrich the soil.

☞ If building a garden in a grassy area, it's important to cultivate so your crop roots can penetrate. Aerate using a spade, pitchfork, or hoe. For a large garden area, you may want to rent or borrow a motor-driven cultivator.

☞ Eggplants need full sun all day.

☞ Do your replantings as soon as early crops are harvested. Keep ahead of the weeds with a hoe or cultivator.

☞ If you preserve figs, gather them several days before they fully ripen to reduce splitting and souring damage.

Trees and Shrubs

☞ Butterfly shrub (buddleia) is difficult to successfully transplant. The best bet is to do root cuttings.

☞ Apply heavy mulch to shrubs during the hot, dry days of summer.

☞ Long periods without rain can stress trees. Water deeply and provide more mulch to keep roots cool and provide moisture. To conserve water, irrigate in early morning or late afternoon.

Flowers

☞ Plant fragrant flowers near your patio or deck. Among the most odoriferous: scabiosa, petunia, calendula, candytuft, ten-weeks stock, ageratum, snapdragon, and sweet sultan.

☞ Cut delphiniums back after blooming to prevent seeding. A second bloom will be encouraged late in summer.

☞ When the kids are old enough, kid-sized garden tools and a defined plot of their own teaches responsibility.

☞ Annual sunflowers are drought-resistant and sun loving. When seed-heads dry out, they'll even provide food for birds. A very large selection is available, both in size and color.

☞ For a longer blooming period, keep faded blooms of annuals pinched off.

Lawn

☞ Heavily compacted soil is most easily aerated with a mechanical device that looks a bit like a lawn roller with hollow tubes attached.

☞ Weed young crabgrass plants by hand if the area is small. Maintain lawn at sufficient height so that young crabgrass seedlings cannot gain a foothold.

☞ Variegated liriope, easily transplanted at any time of year, creates a good groundcover for narrow, confined areas. Secure container grown or separate existing with a sharp knife. An established clump usually yields four clumps.

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Chili peppers are as simple to cultivate as tomatoes, and they need only a small space in your garden to grow.



Courtesy W. Ailee Burpee & Co.



Rainbow swiss chard should be planted in cool weather.

Treatments

☞ Your kitchen garbage makes plants thrive. Banana peels contribute potassium to help roses form big blooms. Chop peels and add around base of plants once a month during summer. Acid-loving plants like azaleas, gardenias and conifers get a helpful fix from coffee grounds. Sprinkle around plants before watering. The grounds also repel slugs. Eggshells contribute calcium, which helps all plants build strong stems. Pulverize eggshells and sprinkle around plant bases once a month.

☞ Aphids have ruined many plants, but so have chemical treatments to remove those tiny pests. Try spraying the leaves with a mild solution of biodegradable soap, using two tablespoons of soap to a gallon of water.

Indoors

☞ Houseplants tend to revitalize if moved outdoors in the summer. Move them to dappled shade for a few days, then to a spot shaded from noontime sun.

☞ Flowers for indoor decorations should be cut early in the morning. Cut at an angle to insure long vase life and place in container of tepid water.

Among good cut flowers are zinnias, sunflowers, crinums, dahlias, rudbeckias, and Mexican sunflowers.



Fall

SEPT | OCT | NOV

Garden Vegetables and Fruits

☞ Sprinkle bonemeal and rock phosphate around the winter garden of cabbage, broccoli and lettuce. Top plants with a layer of compost. This combination will insulate plants from the cold.

☞ Now is a good time to plant a strawberry patch. These ornamental plants with white blossoms and red fruit make attractive, low-edging plants for flowerbeds.

☞ Time to plant fruit trees, blueberries, blackberries and bunch grapes.

☞ Winter squash and pumpkins store better if you leave a few inches of stem attached when you harvest them.

Trees and Shrubs

☞ Crape myrtles are best grown as small deciduous trees.

☞ Remove blooms from shrubs.

☞ Dogwoods contribute a beautiful accent to yard landscapes. When mowing the lawn or using a grass edger, take care not to cut the bark of trees. Otherwise you may attract borers that can damage the tree.

Flowers

☞ Cut faded blooms from roses to prevent plants from producing hips, the fruit that contains the seed. This diverts plant energy to producing flower buds instead of seeds.

☞ Now's the time to harvest dried hydrangea blooms for decorations.

☞ Order tulip bulbs for planting later in the year. Store bulbs under refrigeration at 35 to 40 degrees for 60 days immediately before planting.

☞ Several types of annuals can be taken up in the fall and brought indoors to bloom for several months. Ageratum, browallia, nicotiana, phlox drummondii, petunia, and torenias are among the best.

☞ If October and November are dry, give perennials a deep final soaking so they will go dormant in good condition. They'll be less subject to winterkill.

Lawn

☞ Lawns need about an inch of water a week. When rainfall is scant, measure the amount applied by using coffee cans at equal distance within the sprinkler coverage area. When cans have about an inch of water in them, the lawn will have enough water.

☞ Overseed warm-season grasses such as zoysia, centipede or Bermuda with annual rye grass for winter color. Seed early before tree leaves begin to fall.

Treatments

☞ Three elements cultivated soil often lacks include nitrogen, phosphorus,

and potassium. All three are available in commercial fertilizers.

- Hand pick slugs or set out pans of beer to trap these nighttime nibblers. If you spread poison bait, be careful to keep it away from children and pets.

- When you collect leaves for mulch, select those that curl as they fall such as maple, oak and birch. Flat leaves can create soggy soil. Mix pine straw with broad leaves to help prevent packing.

- A good way to eliminate many insects in the soil is to plow in the fall. Let soil lie fallow over winter. Don't smooth soil surface down into an even layer.

Indoors

- Geraniums make good house plants year-round if given proper care.

- Plants that bring good luck—like lucky bamboo and money tree—continue to gain popularity along with elegant orchids and other tropical plants. Ferns, once popular in the '60's and '70's, are also making a comeback.

- Plant carrot seeds in small pots and place in the sunshine. Before frost, bring them indoors. Place pots among house plants where they give a fern-like accent. Plants do best in bright light.

- Indoor potted plants that have spent the summer outdoors need to slowly adjust to their return inside. Move these potted plants to filtered light for a few days.

- Many herbs are perennials, easy to grow, disease resistant, hardy, useful and inexpensive. Basil, one of the most common herbs that can be found in garden centers, is excellent for growing in pots and indoors.

Miscellaneous Tips

- Study garden catalogs and place orders for plants you'd like to get. Sometimes supply houses sell out early, so it's wise to get orders in the mail. Many local nurseries and garden centers reduce prices in autumn, clearing shelves for winter supplies.

- Landscape planning involves more than beauty. Consider these major factors:

Is the plan functional and suitable? Is it economical? Does it require too much maintenance? Sometimes it pays to consult a landscape architect, landscape gardener, or a master gardener from your local Cooperative Extension service.



Winter

DEC | JAN | FEB

Garden Vegetables and Fruits

- Remove grass and weeds from gardens so they don't become a haven for insect eggs and diseases.



Plant Delights Nursery, Inc.

Calanthe sieboldii takane is a hybrid, hardy orchid that grows easily in a woodland garden.

- Till garden soil to expose wintering insects and eggs to killing temperatures.

- Continue to apply compost and other organic materials to vegetable and flower garden sites. Spade in 3–4 inches to prepare the soil for spring plantings.

Trees and Shrubs

- Trees and shrubs planted now usually have time to become established before spring's warm weather arrives.

- A tree with a 2-inch diameter trunk can easily outgrow a larger tree because it will transition faster and is less likely to go into transition shock when planted.

- When rainfall is scant, continue to water trees and shrubs. Plants need water even when temperatures are low. More shrubs are killed in winter by lack of water than by low temperatures.

- Choose dwarf trees and shrubs to allow closer spacing. For instance, instead of planting full-size southern magnolia, try a selection that will grow to only 30 feet, such as little gem or Bracken's brown beauty.

Flowers

- Complete planting of spring-flowering bulbs. Caladiums and gladioli are outstanding plants in this group.

- Pansies display vibrant colors, with shades of blue, deep purple, wine red, maroon and yellow. Plants flower from fall through late spring.

- Increase stock of perennials by digging/dividing/resetting these: chrysanthemums, daylily, Shasta daisy, aster, coreopsis and gaillardia.

Lawn

- While weather is still cool, plant shade-tolerant groundcover to carpet areas where growing grass is a problem, like underneath shade trees. Some suggestions for shade-tolerant groundcover are: vincas, ajugas, liriopie, pachysandra or English ivy.

- A mowing strip between shrubbery beds and lawn areas will reduce maintenance time.

Indoors

- When using house plants for indoor interest during cold months group those with similar light requirements.

- Leaves of houseplants should be gently washed with warm water at least twice a month to remove dust.

- In terms of cost, beauty, ease and durability, bromeliads make great house plants and reward the grower with pretty blooms and foliage.

