



Okra



It is that time of the year to plant okra. Here are some tips for how you can grow your own okra and enjoy these hot-weather vegetables for months to come.

Okra prefer sandy soil with good drainage and high in organic matter, but will tolerate a wide variety of soils. Soil pH should be between 6.0-6.8. If the soil is too acidic, okra pods will not develop properly. Before planting, make sure to have the soil tested at your local Extension office.

Some popular okra varieties are Clemson Spineless, Annie Oakley, Burgundy, and Cajun Delight. Okra prefers to be planted in a very sunny location. Plant okra on the garden's north side so shorter plants receive adequate sun. Soak okra seeds in water the night before planting to speed up germination. Most okra varieties require a fair amount of garden space to grow. You will want to plant each okra seed in the row 4 inches apart at a planting depth of 1 inch. Once the okra become seedlings, thin the plants to about 15 inches between each plant.

In late summer when okra plants become tall, cut them back to a height of 3 to 4 feet to renew the plants and make harvesting easier. This is also a good time to side-dress the okra with a nitrogen fertilizer. Alternatively, you can plant a second crop of okra 6 weeks after the first planting.

Okra generally have minimal disease problems, but are sensitive to root knot nematodes. Insect pests of okra include aphids, corn earworms, stink bugs, leaf-footed bugs, loopers, and ants. Use an organic mulch to conserve soil moisture and help with weed control.

The time between planting and first harvest is about 65 days. Harvest okra by snapping or cutting the pods from the plant. Even spineless okra varieties cause some irritation, so make sure to wear long sleeves when interacting with a plant. Pick the pods when they are about 3 inches long. The pods grow fast! They should be preserved or prepared within a few days of picking.

For more advice on how to grow a successful garden, see Extension Publication P3616, *Mississippi Vegetable Gardener's Guide*.



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Garden Soil Preparation

No matter what type of soil you have in your garden, adding organic matter can significantly improve it. If your soil is heavy clay, organic matter enhances drainage and aeration while promoting better root development. In sandy soils, it helps retain moisture and nutrients.

To make a noticeable difference in soil structure, a substantial amount of organic material should be incorporated. Ideally, at least one-third of the final soil mix should consist of organic matter. Achieve this by spreading a 2- to 4-inch layer of organic material over the garden surface and tilling it to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. At the same time, apply the recommended amount of fertilizer and incorporate it into the soil along with the organic matter.

While some gardeners prefer using a shovel or spading fork to prepare the soil, many opt for a more efficient method. If you own a rototiller or plan to rent or purchase one, the following tips can help make the job easier:

- Leave an untilled row between passes to allow for smoother, wider turns. This prevents the tiller from pulling itself—and you—into the next row.



- When working with heavy clay soil or breaking new ground, lower the tiller's engine speed. This allows the soil to be turned more thoroughly while reducing excessive bouncing and bucking.
- If tilling for the first time, don't attempt to reach the full depth on the first pass. Instead, set the brake stake to half the desired depth for the initial pass, then adjust it to full depth and go over the area again.
- Till only when the soil is slightly dry and friable. Wet soil can form large clumps that harden as they dry, making future work more difficult. Additionally, wet soil can stick to tiller blades, causing imbalance and unnecessary wear on both the machine and the operator.



Where to Find Organic Matter

Organic matter—an essential component for improving soil and nourishing beneficial microbes—comes in many forms. You can use peat moss, compost, hay, grass clippings, barnyard manure, shredded bark, leaves, or even shredded newspaper to enhance your garden soil.

Garden Calendar: April

Planting

- Divide Violets, Shasta Daisies, Liriope, Ajuga, Mums and other Perennials.
- Plant Okra, Melons, Peas, Corn, Beans, Eggplant, Cucumbers, and Tomatoes.
- Set out Basil.
- Set out summer annuals if danger of frost is past: Ageratum, Allysum, Begonias, Geraniums, Dianthus, Celosia, Marigolds, Moss Rose, Petunias, Impatiens, Coleus, and Caladiums.
- Plant summer and fall blooming bulbs: Callas, Cannas, Dahlias, Gladiolus, and Gloriosa Lilies.
- Sow Zinnias for early summer blooms.



Fertilizing

- Fertilize Tomatoes with 10-10-10



Pruning

- Remove any freeze-damaged and dead wood.
- Prune Azaleas during or after blooming. Remove faded flowers from Kurume Azaleas.
- Prune flowering shrubs after they finish blooming. If pruning can be done while the shrub is flowering, the trimmed off parts can be brought indoors for floral displays.
- Disbud roses and peonies for specimen flowers.



Mulch

- Always mulch in new plantings to help assure success.

Miscellaneous

- National Arbor Day is the fourth Friday of April.
- Paint and repair garden furniture and other hard construction (bird bath, bird houses, mailbox, deck, etc.).
- Buy Azaleas in bloom to be sure of color.





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Companion Planting

Companion planting is a fantastic way to make the most of your garden space and protect plants from insects. A simple example of saving space by companion planting is to plant radishes and carrots side by side. One of the most famous examples of companion planting is the three sisters model that incorporates corn, beans, and squash into the same garden area:

- Beans provide corn with nitrogen.
- Corn provides climbing stalks for the beans.
- Squash helps prevent weed growth and keeps animal pests away.



Companion planting is used for pest management through three different methods:

- **With smells:** Plants can emit odors to attract insects, repel insects, or mask other plants.
- **By attracting predators or parasitoids:** Parasitoids lay eggs inside other insects while predator insects eat other insects. Creating a habitat and providing food for predators and parasitoids can help you better manage garden pests.
- **By being visually distracting:** Insects can easily find gardens that have the same visual cues such as leaf shape or color from target plants. Having a variety of plants with different colors, textures, and heights makes it harder for pests to find your garden.

Brassicas:

- Some brassica crops such as arugula and mustard can be trap crops for flea beetles.
- Sage and thyme can reduce diamondback moth numbers in brussel sprouts.
- Onion, nasturtium, and thyme can help reduce pests in broccoli.
- Marigold, nasturtium, and onion can help reduce cabbage worms in cabbage.

Tomatoes:

- Some studies have shown that marigolds and basil can help reduce thrip populations.
- Companion planting with basil may even help promote growth of tomatoes.

Squash and pumpkins:

- Squash and pumpkins need pollinators to successfully grow. Planting flowers that attract pollinators such as bees and butterflies will help these vegetables grow.
- Cucumber beetles can be pulled away from other cucurbits by planting blue hubbard squash that attracts squash beetles, cucumber beetles, and squash vine borer.
- Marigold and nasturtium can reduce cucumber beetle and squash bug damage.
- Sweet alyssum and African marigold can increase enemy of aphids to reduce aphid damage and increase squash yield.

Sweet corn:

- Flowering plants such as buckwheat, sunn hemp, and cowpea have been shown to increase parasitoids and insect predators of corn earworm



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Citrus Greening Disease



Photo Courtesy of USDA APHIS

You may be aware by now that Huanglongbing (HLB), known as Citrus Greening Disease, has been confirmed in Mississippi. USDA APHIS (Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service) has confirmed HLB was present in plant tissue samples collected from several residential locations in Harrison County, Mississippi. As a result, a STATEWIDE QUARANTINE for citrus has been issued for Citrus Greening Disease.

So, what does this mean for Mississippians? A statewide quarantine means it's still acceptable to sell or move citrus plants within the quarantined area, which is the State of Mississippi but, one cannot move citrus plants across state lines, either in or out without going through USDA protocol. You can find more information at <https://www.usda.gov/>.

Citrus Greening is a bacterial infection of citrus plants. The disease colonizes in the phloem tissue, reducing the plant's ability to transport nutrients. It is one of the most serious citrus diseases in the world. There is no cure. Once infected, most trees die within a few years.

An infected tree can remain asymptomatic, serving as a source of bacteria that infects other trees. Over time, an infected tree will start producing fewer fruit that are partially green, smaller, irregularly shaped, and taste bitter. Leaves may show asymmetrical and blotchy mottling. Trees may show twig dieback and premature fruit drop.

In the United States, HLB is spread by a tiny insect called the Asian citrus psyllid (*Diaphorina citri* Kuwayama). It is a vector, carrying and spreading the disease to other hosts using its piercing-sucking mouth parts. Eggs are yellow-orange and almond-shaped. They are often tucked inside crevices and leaf folds. Nymphs are difficult to see, but leave behind waxy, white excretions on plants. Adult psyllids are gnat-sized, only about 1/8-inch long with mottled brown wings. The last two segments of their antennae are black. When approached, they jump or fly.

While the disease poses no health threat to people or animals, it has devastated millions of acres of citrus trees throughout the United States and abroad. Citrus greening is currently found throughout Georgia, Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. It is also found in portions of Alabama, California, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Texas. Although it has recently been detected in Mississippi, it's possible HLB has been here for some time.



Photos Courtesy of USDA APHIS



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April Lawn Care

As Springtime brings longer days and warmer weather, you know it's time to do the necessary maintenance to ensure a beautiful, healthy lawn. Now is a great time to begin to rake, aerate, overseed, and fertilize your lawn.

A buildup of thatch can smother your lawn and provide an environment for diseases. A simple way to remove thatch is by brisk raking or you can use a de thatching machine.



Aerating and soil testing may also be beneficial in getting the most out of your fertilizer and watering routine. Aerating your lawn will allow water to penetrate deeper into the lawn soil to reduce the need for water during the dryer months ahead. You can use a garden fork to punch holes in your lawn to help aerate the soil. And, of course, your local MSU Extension Office can assist you in processing a soil sample to ensure you are using a properly formulated fertilizer to fit your lawn's needs.

Application of a spring type fertilizer should perk up your lawn and help to improve the overall color and appearance, in addition to overseeding which will help to "fill-in" your lawn and deter the re-growth of moss and weeds. You may also want to consider post and pre-emergent pesticides for weed control. Depending upon whether a weed is annual or perennial, you will determine which type you will use. Apply chemical pre-emergent herbicides by spot-spraying weeds before the first mowing rather than over-spraying the entire lawn.

Finally, proper watering is essential to any healthy lawn. During the spring season, you should aim to give your lawn 1 to 1 1/2 inches of water per week. As temperatures rise in the summer, watering twice a week and sometimes three, adding an extra half inch of water to account for the added heat. Be sure to account for any spring and summer showers your lawn may have gotten.

As we get into mowing season, you want to first perform proper servicing of your lawn mower. Your mower may require a tune-up if it is stubborn to start and be sure that your blades are sharp to prevent tearing the grass tips. Set your blades on 2 1/2 inches to help avoid scalping your lawn and cut away! A mulching blade will also help to prevent the need to rake or bag your clippings, prevent thatch build up, and provide food for your lawn. It is also important to practice proper safety and to stay hydrated while working out in the heat!





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Spring Garden Checklist

Spring is here! The weather is transitioning from cold to warmer. The days are getting longer, and plants are blooming. Spring weather is the ideal time for gardening and focusing on a fresh start from the winter months. Some spring gardening checklist ideas can include the following:

Garden Site Selection

- Choose a site that is close to the house in an open area to receive full sun and not shaded by trees.
- Choose a site that is near a water supply.
- Choose a site that has loose, well-drained soil.
- Select a site that is less susceptible to weeds.
- Fencing the garden site can help keep out animals as well as removing tree limbs that hang over the garden site.
- Designing your garden with careful planning such as spacing between rows, available equipment, and drainage availability can help reduce work and increase the garden productivity.



Prepare the Soil

- Soil affects the way vegetables and plants grow.
- Soil testing is a great way to measure the acidity or alkalinity of the soil by determining the soil's pH. An ideal pH for garden soil is between 6.0-7.0. A soil test will indicate if lime is needed. Lime is the most effective tool for improving the soil.
- Fertilizer needs can also be determined by conducting a soil test.



Planting

- Determining planting dates, types of vegetables planted (cool season or warm season) and planting zones can greatly benefit the productivity of the garden.
- Mulch can be used to keep moisture in and help regulate the temperature of the soil. Mulching provides better plant growth, higher yields and can also aid in the prevention of weeds.
- Water is crucial for vegetable gardens, and they require about 1 inch of water per week.
- Monitoring your garden and noting any problems can help identify if an insecticide or pesticide strategy is needed.



For more information, refer to Publication 3616, *Mississippi Vegetable Gardener's Guide*. If you have any questions, contact your local Extension Office.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

| DATE | EVENT |
|----------|--|
| April 9 | <p style="text-align: center;">Grow-A-Row To Share</p> <p>Forrest County Extension located at 953 Sullivan Dr in Hattiesburg beginning at 5:30 PM. This program is designed to make a difference in the community by sharing harvests. Anyone can participate in this free program! A Food Safety Training will begin at 5:30 PM. To register, call Forrest County Extension at 601-545-6083.</p> |
| April 12 | <p style="text-align: center;">30th Annual Landscape Symposium—Your Yard: A Garden Party</p> <p>Stone County: First Methodist Church in Wiggins , 520 East Pine Ave from 8:30 AM—3:00 PM. This year's annual program features Martha Hill – Hardscapes in the Landscape, Felder Rushing x 2– Unexpected Ways to Improve Any Garden, and Round Robin Make & Take with local Master Gardeners. Pre-Registration is Required by March 31, 2025 by calling the Stone County Extension office at 601-928-5286. Cost to attend is \$10.00, lunch included. Seating is limited. See flyer for details.</p> |
| April 13 | <p style="text-align: center;">Strawberries and Cream Festival</p> <p>Crosby Arboretum: 1:00—4:00 PM. Free Admission. The public is invited to celebrate part of the Mississippi State University Crosby Arboretum's history during the Strawberries & Cream Festival April 13 in Picayune. The event commemorates the Depression-era strawberry farm located on the grounds of what is now a premier native plant conservatory.</p> <p>Attendees will enjoy live music, giveaways, shopping from vendors, Picayune Frog Lemonade, fresh strawberries with toppings and ice cream. Young attendees can also enjoy a children's crafts and cupcake decorating booth.</p> <p>Vendors will include La Terre Farms with fresh flowers, PJ's Coffee, The Sugary Sweet Homestead with sour-dough breads, Pine Needle Baskets by Denine and more.</p> <p>Attendees can take photos at a 1930s-era soda fountain and with a 1931 Ford Model A farm truck. Costumes and props will be available.</p> <p>Festivalgoers can also enjoy the arboretum's three miles of walking trails, which will be in bloom with various spring flowers and plants.</p> |
| April 22 | <p style="text-align: center;">Pond Management Workshop & Demonstration</p> <p>Hancock County: 2:00—3:30 PM presentation followed by a pond demonstration. Kiln Public Library (17065 HWY 603, Kiln, MS 39556). Presenters will include Dr. Wes Neal (MSU Extension/Research Professor), Marty Fulton (USDA, NRCS), Camden Oglesby (MSU Extension), and Barry Pessoney (USDA, NRCS). The workshop will focus on pond building, stocking, and fishing as well as NRCS pond programs. No RSVP is required.</p> |



Spring
IS
here





Grow-A-Row to Share

What is our goal?

**Making a difference in our community
by sharing our harvest!**

Who can participate?

Anyone can participate in this free program!

Food Safety Training:

**Wednesday, April 9th @5:30 p.m.
Forrest County Extension Office
952 Sullivan Drive
Hattiesburg, Mississippi 39401**

How to sign up? Contact:

Petal Healing Gardens

or

**Forrest County Extension Office
601-545-6083**



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30th Annual Landscape Symposium
featuring
Your Yard: A Garden Party

April 12, 2025

First Methodist Church - Wiggins
520 East Pine Ave. Wiggins, MS 39577

Program:

Martha Hill – Hardscapes in the Landscape
Felder Rushing x 2– Unexpected Ways to Improve Any Garden
Round Robin Make & Take with local Master Gardeners
Lunch included
Master Gardener Plant sale on site, Raffle, Silent Auction
Registration 8:00 AM. Program 8:30 AM – 3:00 PM

Pre-Registration is Required before March 31, 2025.
- \$10.00. Seating is limited.

Make checks payable to: Stone County Master Gardeners and mail to:
Stone County Master Gardeners
214 N. Critz Street, Suite A,
Wiggins, MS 39577

For more information contact the Stone County Extension Office at 601-928-5286

Sponsored by: Mississippi State University Extension Service
Stone County Master Gardeners

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2025

The Crosby Arboretum

STRAWBERRIES & CREAM FESTIVAL

Strawberries and ice cream
Picayune Frog Lemonade
Music and giveaways
Native plants in bloom
Children's activities
Cupcake decorating
Shop our vendors • Food trucks
Photo stations with props/costumes
1931 Model A farm truck and 1930s soda fountain

**Sunday
April 13
1pm–4pm**

No entry fee!

370 Ridge Road • Picayune, MS • www.crosbyarboretum.msstate.edu



This project is supported by the MEMBERS of Coast Electric through Operation Round Up and their Community Trust, in partnership with the Gulf Coast Community Foundation.

Mississippi State University is an equal opportunity institution. For disability accommodation, please contact the Crosby Arboretum at (601) 799-2311 ext. 0 or s.lowe@msstate.edu.

The Crosby Arboretum Foundation

