

# December 2017

Ornamental Updates is a monthly newsletter of the LSU AgCenter.

## Letter from the Editor

Hello readers,

2017 is coming to a close and I would like to thank everyone for their support of the changes in Ornamental Updates and the LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station Facebook. Allen Owings handed us very large shoes to fill, but with team effort and collaboration we made it to the New Year! Our goal for 2018 is to continue sharing horticultural information through Facebook, radio, LSU AgCenter Website, and Ornamental Updates for both industry and the public.

Please feel free to send any recommendations, articles, or questions to my email, [jpittman@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:jpittman@agcenter.lsu.edu).

Happy Holidays!

Jean Pittman, Lee Rouse, Jason Stagg, and Dr. Yan Chen

## **Greenhouse Grower 2017 LSU Field Trials Results**

The Louisiana State University AgCenter Hammond Research Station trialed approximately 250 new variety entries this year in Hammond. Weather in spring to late summer was wetter than normal, and spring temperatures were much cooler. The trials experienced fewer days below 90 degrees than is normally expected.

The trial gardens also received a new trial garden coordinator, Dr. Yan Chen, who took over after the retirement of Allen Owings, a professor and research coordinator at LSU.

### **Top Performers**

Coleus: Flame Thrower Salsa Verde (Selecta)  
Begonia: Whopper Rose with Bronze Leaf Improved (Ball Ingenuity)  
Begonia: MegaWatt Red Bronze Leaf (PanAmerican Seed)  
New Guinea Impatiens: Divine Red Improved (PanAmerican Seed)  
Hot Pepper: Mad Hatter (PanAmerican Seed)  
Lantana: Bloomify Series (Ball FloraPlant)  
Pentas: Lucky Star Pink (PanAmerican Seed)  
Pentas: Lucky Star Dark Red (PanAmerican Seed)  
Pentas: Lucky Star Lavender (PanAmerican Seed)  
Ornamental Pepper: Midnight Fire (PanAmerican Seed)  
Zinnia: Double Zahara Raspberry Ripple (PanAmerican Seed)

### **Best of Show**

Alternanthera: Purple Prince (PanAmerican Seed)  
Unique Varieties  
Ornamental Sugar Cane: Pele's Smoke  
Snack Pepper: Candy Cane Red (PanAmerican Seed)  
Amaranthus: Hot Biscuits

### **Best of the Early Season (Spring)**

Phlox: Gisele White (Selecta)  
Dianthus: Jolt Pink Magic (PanAmerican Seed)  
Petunia: ColorRush Pink Vein (Ball FloraPlant)  
Verbena: EnduraScape Blue Improved (Ball FloraPlant)  
Ornamental Millet: Copper Prince (PanAmerican Seed)

### **Best of the Summer**

Coleus 'Flame Thrower Salsa Verde' (Selecta)  
New Guinea Impatiens 'Divine Red Improved' (PanAmerican Seed)

### **Best of the Fall**

Sunflower: Autumn Gold Willowleaf (Darwin Perennials)  
Miscanthus: Bandwidth (Darwin Perennials)  
Sunflower: Sunfinity (Syngenta Flowers)  
Surprise of the Trials  
Lavandula: Meerlo (Southern Living Plant Collection)

## **Planting Trees and Shrubs in Winter**

*Lee Rouse, Photos by Jean Pittman*

As we transition from season to season, our beloved trees and shrubs are going to sleep for the winter — or so it seems. It appears that no growth is occurring this time of year, and that is correct if you are only looking at the aboveground portion of trees and shrubs. Because we don't see any new foliage growth, it would be easy to conclude now is an unfavorable time to plant. However, now is actually the most appropriate time to plant trees and shrubs. It is best for trees and shrubs to be planted in the late fall to winter (November to January) because soil temperatures stay relatively constant and remain much higher than the air temperatures above. While the plant may seem to be dormant for the winter, this is only true for the part of the plant that is above the soil line. The roots grow during the winter, but they grow very slowly. During this time of year when just the roots are growing, it is not necessary for the roots to provide the aboveground portion of the tree with nutrients or water as it is in the warmer parts of the year.

Planting in fall gives trees and shrubs an additional four to five months of root growth before the roots have to perform any major tasks. Because the roots have time to spread out in the soil, this will help to ensure our success in the garden. The more water the plant can take up during our dreadful summer heat, the easier it will be to shirk potential stress. On the contrary, if the same plant would have been planted in spring, this plant would have a much smaller window of time to put out roots before the scorching hot summer begins.

Planting trees and shrubs in late fall or winter will provide a stronger root system for the plant, leading to a healthier, more beautiful garden. Though the trees and shrubs will have the plenty of new root growth spreading into the surrounding area, it is still necessary to monitor water for the first one to two years after planting. This is called the establishment period. One to two years after planting, the trees and shrubs should need little to no additional water other than rainfall unless we are experiencing a severe drought. This is great news for gardeners, as we will not have to be out in the yard as much hand watering thirsty plants. So, get your trees and shrubs planted now in the fall and enjoy the ease of gardening in the summer.

## "Crape Murder"

*Lee Rouse and Dr. Allen Owings*

There are more crape myrtles being pruned improperly than crape myrtles being pruned properly. Although this practice does not kill the tree, it can result in trees declining in health after years of improper pruning. Wood decay can occur. If a crape myrtle becomes too large for a certain location, either it was planted in the wrong spot in the landscape, or the wrong variety was selected. When selecting crape myrtles, consider the trees' size at maturity, not just their flower color.

When pruning a crape myrtle, plants should be thinned, not topped. Remove branches that rub against each other. Prune out branches that cross each other or are in competition with each other. Remove branches that do not contribute to the overall growth direction and shape that you desire for the tree. Also, eliminate suckers at the base of the tree and watersprouts (vigorous upright growth) in the tree canopy. Late fall through late winter is the ideal time to prune crape myrtles.

Properly pruned crape myrtles will have:

- Stronger wood
- More flowers
- Larger flowers
- More pollinating insects
- Enhanced bark features
- Fewer watersprouts
- Fewer suckers
- More birds nesting
- Less fungal decay in wood
- Fewer insects and sooty mold
- Less leaf spot
- More canopy air circulation

It is everyone's right to prune their plants how they desire, but it is best to follow recommended horticultural practices to improve long-term plant health. Encourage your fellow residents to prune crape myrtles properly. When allowed to grow and mature, they are beautiful, majestic trees. If you must prune crape myrtles, do it right.

## Edible Ornamental Redbor Kale

*Dan Gill, photos by Jean Pittman*

Redbor kale is the first edible Louisiana Super Plants selection. It is an incredible multiuse annual for the cool-season flower or vegetable garden. Although perfectly edible, it is so attractive it is being promoted as an ornamental for planting in flowerbeds. Ornamental kales have been around for a long time. They are short plants that produce a rosette of frilly blue-green to blue-purple leaves. The colorful leaves that are produced in the center of the plants in shades of white, pink, red and purple are the main ornamental feature. Although ornamental kales are edible, they are primarily used in flowerbeds and other ornamental plantings and are rarely consumed.

Redbor kale is beautiful — plenty pretty enough for the flower garden. But it belongs to the vegetable kale group, not the ornamental kale group. You can tell this by how it grows. Ornamental kale has been bred and selected to stay very short – the leaves are very closely spaced and form a rosette or crown. Vegetable kale looks similar when young, but eventually the main stem begins to elongate. Over time, vegetable kale grows taller than ornamental kale. And the center leaves do not turn a bright color.

The dramatic beauty of Redbor kale comes from its striking dark purple-red foliage. Adding to this is the interesting texture of the plant that is created by the finely curled and frilly foliage — producing an almost cloud-like effect. The rich, dark color of the foliage is wonderful when used in flowerbeds as a foil with brightly colored flowers, and it combines well with virtually any color scheme.

A fall planting will provide the most spectacular plants and the biggest bang for your buck. Like all kales, Redbor is extremely cold tolerant and will not be bothered by winter weather. Even temperatures in the mid to low teens will not affect it. It will grow in your gardens through the winter, getting larger and more beautiful with each passing month.

[Read more here](#)

LSU AgCenter Superplant 'Redbor Hybrid'

'Winterbor Hybrid'

## Featured Plant Varieties

[Sorbet Violas](#), photo by Jean Pittman

[Camelot Foxglove](#), photo by Igor Kamalov

[October Magic White Shi-Shi Camellia](#)  
[Southern Living Plant Collection](#)

## Renew Your Pesticide Applicator Proficiency Test

*Kim Pope*

All licensed pesticide applicators are required to take a proficiency test in 2017. Additional dates are still available for Pesticide Applicator Proficiency Test. Please check for available dates [here](#) and for more information click the link below.

[LaDAF website](#)

Ornamental Updates in a monthly newsletter from the LSU AgCenter.  
Prepared by: [Jean Pittman B.S.](#), [Lee Rouse, B.S.](#), [Yan Chen, Ph.D.](#), [Jason Stagg, M.S](#)

LSU AgCenter Hammond Research  
Station | 21549 Old Covington Hwy,  
Hammond, LA 70403  
[\(985\) 543-4125](tel:(985)543-4125) | [WEBSITE](#) | [EMAIL](#)

[Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [YouTube](#) [Instagram](#)

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