



ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM/ LIMESTONE COUNTY OFFICE

The Garden Spot For week of March 23, 2009

The Garden Spot Opens Today!

Starting this week, during the gardening season, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System will be providing a weekly news column on some aspect of home gardening. We will try to provide timely information with helpful tips that will make your home garden a success. As our season progresses, you'll find some information on using and preserving the bounties from your garden.

If you have questions on home gardening or related topics, remember that the Limestone County Master Gardeners have a 'HelpLine' on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. They are highly trained and willing to help with your home gardening and home grounds questions. Their phone number is 232-5510 and they are located in an office at the Limestone County Extension Office at 1109 W. Market Street in Athens.

Planning Your Home Garden

Regardless of the reason for growing your own vegetables, a successful garden only comes with proper planning and constant attention. Important elements include careful site selection, planting at the right time, using the right amount of fertilizer, using varieties adapted to your region, controlling pests, and harvesting at the right time. We'll start this week with site selection and getting your soil tested.

Site Selection

It is important to choose a site with at least six to eight hours of full sun. Vegetables will not grow well in competition with trees or in shade. A garden site should have well-drained soil and be free of chemicals and debris. If you have not planted a garden in the past, start preparing your garden spot now to get it ready. We'll address raised beds and container garden spots in a few weeks.

Lime and Fertilizer

The best way to determine the nutritional needs of your soil is by soil testing at least every three years. Information for soil tests can be obtained from your County Extension office. Stop by the Extension office NOW to get your kit to take your soil sample. You'll need to get a sample of soil from 6-8 places in your garden, mix it up, and send it to the soil testing laboratory at Auburn University. You should have your results in less than two weeks. The results will give you information on how much and what type of fertilizer you need to apply to your garden spot. You'll also find out if you need to add lime to your garden. While it is best to mix the lime into the soil a few weeks before planting, it's not too late to get your soil in good condition for this growing season!

Harvesting

The main reason for having a garden is to produce fresh, high-quality vegetables. Home-grown produce takes a lot of work and a lot of Tender Loving Care. Be prepared to invest time in a good home garden. It will pay off! You'll have fresh, tasty produce that will be good and good for you. And then you'll have the opportunity to preserve those bounties for the months to come.

If you have questions on home gardening, call the Limestone County Master Gardeners at 256-232-5510. They are in the office Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. You may leave a message for them at other times and they will call you back.

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