

# Prepare now for spring vegetable gardening season

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson



January 12, 2011



It's mid-January and recent nighttime temperatures have dipped into the very chilly zone.

Nevertheless, a hint of gardening fever already is in the air as experienced gardeners know in just a few weeks the spring gardening season will be under way.

Now is the time to make preparations for a successful home vegetable season.

We try to get plants in the ground as quickly as possible after the last expected frost.

Experienced gardeners also know as summer approaches, some heat sensitive plants such as tomatoes and beans will stop blooming and/or setting blossoms at temperatures above 90 degrees.

An important key to successful spring gardening is getting maximum production before the summer heat sets in.

So you're aware of the health benefits of eating fresh vegetables, you have the space for a small garden, but just don't know where to start.

Look no further. Plan now to attend a program on "Successful Spring Vegetable Gardening" to be held at the Galveston County Extension Office, 5115 State Highway 3, in Dickinson.

This program is Saturday, from 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Pre-registration is required because of limited seating.

Visit or contact the County Extension Office by e-mail at [galv3\(at\)wt.net](mailto:galv3(at)wt.net) or by phone at

281-534-3413, Ext. 1-2, to make your reservation.

Luke Stripling is a certified Texas Master Gardener and will serve as the program speaker. He has accumulated a wealth of knowledge and hands-on experience on home vegetable gardening.

He will provide information on a variety of topics including soil preparation, types of vegetables that do well here, variety selection, fertilization and pest control.

Learn from a gardening expert, start with the right information now, dedicate some sweat equity and you will enjoy the experience of eating fresh, crisp vegetables you grew yourself.

Whether you're an experi-

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*News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.*



enced or a novice gardener, be sure to make a notation on your gardening calendar to attend this program to learn what you need to know to put fresh, tasty vegetables on your dinner table this spring.

#### Gardeners' Q&A

Q: I received a Norfolk Island Pine for Christmas. Will this tree live outdoors or must I keep it indoors year-round? How do I care for it?

A: The Norfolk Island Pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*) is not really a pine at all.

It is a narrow-leaf evergreen plant with many short needle-like leaves arranged along the stems.

This coniferous (cone-bearing) evergreen is actually a tropical plant native to Norfolk Island, which is located between New Caledonia and Australia in the South Pacific.

Norfolk Island pines should be kept indoors during the winter whenever cold weather conditions threaten.

You can put it outdoors but after the threat of frost has past. While indoors, it can be placed in bright light during the winter months.

During the summer months, move it to partial shade.

In its native habitat, the Norfolk Island pine can reach a height of 150 or 200 feet with a 9- to 10-foot diameter trunk.

However, as a houseplant, it usually is restricted to not more than 6 to 8 feet in height.

Soil around the roots should be kept moist, but never overly wet nor dry. Excessively wet or dry soil, as well as age, may cause the lower limbs to drop off.

As a houseplant, a Norfolk Island pine only occasionally needs repotting. Fertilize with a houseplant fertilizer in spring and in midsummer.

Q: I never have cut back my liriopie. I have been told you are supposed to do it every year. Is this really something that must be done and if so when?

A: Liriopie is a very tough plant; in most settings, you can provide very little care to liriopie and it will continue to grow and flower.

The purpose of the annual removal of all leaves is to rid the plant of unsightly and damaged leaves.

Old leaves can create an unsightly contrast with the new leaves as they emerge from the ground by mid-February.

Try mowing or clipping off all the leaves to within one inch from the ground before new growth begins to emerge in late winter.

Q: In some years, my peach tree produces a bumper crop of fruit but they are small.

What causes a peach tree to produce small fruit in some years?

A: Peach trees have the potential of setting excessive fruit loads. If such heavy loads are left on the tree, the peaches will be numerous in number but be small size in when mature.

More important, fruit production, if any, during the following year would likely be drastically reduced.

A heavy crop year results in very little manufactured food reserves and nutrients being available to a tree to produce fruit over the next growing season.

The net result is known as alternate or biennial bearing.

To overcome this tendency to bear fruit in alternate years, proper fruit thinning must be practiced and proper irrigation and fertilization must be provided throughout the growing season.

