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Living
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The Press and Standard

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HOW IS THE POLLEN COUNT MEASURED

By Scott Grooms

It's spring, time for warm weather, beautiful flowers, trips to the beach and, of course, pollen count.

The pollen count is a measurement of the number of pollen grains in a given volume of air. Pollen counts, and forecasts of pollen conditions, are routinely produced and reported to the public because high aerial pollen concentration is associated with increased rates of allergic reaction for those with conditions such as hay fever and asthma. Mild winters with warmer days lead to increases in pollen counts.

One method to sample pollen from the air is the Burkard trap, which is a seven-day volumetric spore trap, which works by facing towards the wind and drawing in air into the trap using a pump. The pollen particles drawn in are then stuck to a silicone grease-coated tape that is attached to a rotating drum. The drum

slowly rotates one turn over the course of seven days while collecting particles. The tape is removed after one week,

cut into day-length sections, and these sections are mounted on a microscope slide. The gelatin of the microslide stains

plant material magenta, making the pollen easy to differentiate from other when analyzed under a microscope. The tape is typically analyzed for pollen prevalence. The number of pollen grains in a given volume of air can then be calculated by entering the pollen counts into a formula.

Another method uses a rotating silicone grease-coated rod, called a rotorod, this works in principle just like a Burkard trap.

Machines that use a camera paired with computer software to automatically count and identify pollen samples in the field have also been developed and in operation today. This saves time, standardizes data collection, and provide real-time pollen counts.

These methods will indicate the effect of pollen on the community and better let the public know how to prepare for pollen season.



Cedar tree pollen

WEATHERPROOFING OUTDOOR FURNITURE

By Scott Grooms

To furnish your deck or front porch for the summer, reusing furniture you have in storage might be a good option. Here are a few tips for weatherizing your furniture for use outside this summer.

If your furniture is made of wood, use an outdoor deck stain to seal the piece. First, sand the piece to bare wood, making sure to wear a respirator mask. It is very important to seal any exposed end grain (the bottoms of chair and dresser feet), these tend to soak up moisture. You can use a clear penetrating epoxy sealer before applying the stain to seal these areas. If you prefer to paint, prime the piece, and then use a paint made for outdoor surfaces. Apply a second coat for a full and smooth look.

If your furniture of choice is wicker, give your piece two coats of the paint, then top it with a layer of spray marine varnish. Wicker traps moisture, and it can easily

get under the finish if not properly painted. This will damage the fibers from the inside out. Marine Varnish is strong enough to seal out the moisture, spray lacquer is simply not durable enough to do the job. Follow up every two to three years with a fresh coat to maintain a durable, water-resistant finish.

Metal furniture is extremely durable outside. If you have a piece that is in need of a little restoration, sand off as much rust and peeling paint as possible. After prepping and cleaning off the dust and particles, treat the furniture with a fish-oil-based primer. This prevents corrosion and binds to the rust to create a paintable surface. Then give it a fresh coat of paint. If your piece is already rust-free, a coat of spray paint is all it needs; black holds up best against the sun's rays but you may want to put an all-weather cushion in place for comfort.

Source – [ThisOldHouse.com](https://www.thisoldhouse.com) / Katelin Hill



GETTING YOUR GARDEN STARTED

By Dana Erickson

According to Southern Living, there are prime times to plant certain vegetables for your garden. Below are their recommendations for when to plant what.

What to Plant in January: Spend this month preparing the soil and the space you've chosen for your garden. This can be out in the yard, or you can grow vegetables in pots.

What to Plant in February: Beets

What to Plant in March: Cabbage, Carrots, Collards, Kale, Lettuce, Onions, Potatoes (white), Radishes, Swiss Chard, Turnips

What to Plant in April: Pole Beans, Broccoli, Cantaloupe, Corn, Spinach, Squash (summer and winter)

What to Plant in May: Lima Beans, Cucumbers, Eggplant, Okra, Peppers, Sweet Potatoes, Watermelon

What to Plant in June: Tomatoes

What to Plant in July: Pole Beans, Lima Beans, Pumpkins, Winter Squash

What to Plant in August: Kale, Beets, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Carrots

What to Plant in September: Kale, Onions, Swiss Chard, Turnips

From October through December: Spend these months preparing your next year's planting guide!



PREPPING YOU LAWN MOWER



By Scott Grooms

Now is the time right now to get your lawn tractor or mower ready for the season.

If you have an electric mower, there's nothing to do beyond sharpening the blade and charging the battery. A gas mower will need a little more attention before its first run of the season.

The first step is to change or check the oil. After storage for the winter, your mower needs to have its engine oil refreshed. Consult your owner's manual to see whether it prescribes changing the oil completely or just topping it off.

If your manual says you can just top off your mower, check the engine oil level as described in the manual and add oil as necessary. But don't use the mower before then. A mower engine can overheat and fail prematurely from insufficient oil.

Before you start up your mower, make sure that it has fresh fuel and a new fuel filter. A mower carrying leftover fuel could create problems that require you to drain the lines. Remove old gas from the tank using a siphon. Then fill the tank with fresh fuel.

Sharpening the blades is very important. Dull blades rip rather than slice grass, and that makes your mower work harder than it needs to. It also isn't good for the health of your lawn. You can remove the blades yourself and take them to a hardware store or other retailer that sells outdoor equipment for sharpening.

To remove your mower's blades, wear heavy leather gloves, remove the spark plug wire, and place a short 2x4 to keep the blade from turning as you loosen the bolts. Even tractor blades should be

sharpened three times a year.

If you have a battery mower, remove the battery before removing and sharpening the blade or blades. And on battery-powered tractors where you can't remove the battery, remove the key first, and then remove and sharpen the blades.

Your spark plug needs changing about every 100 hours of operation; if not, it can affect engine start-up and overall performance.

With the mower off, remove the spark plug boot and use a socket wrench with a spark plug socket to remove the old plug. Take it to an auto parts store or outdoor power equipment dealer for a replacement.

With a battery mower, there are no spark plugs, but you'll need to charge the battery before you get to work.

For a tractor, most manuals instruct you to keep the battery indoors on a trickle charger. If you didn't, fully recharge the battery before starting the season or you'll reduce battery life. The engine alone can't fully recharge the battery.

Mower air filters are typically made of pleated paper and can be removed in seconds. Take the old one to a lawn mower dealer, hardware store or power equipment dealer if you're not sure which one to get. If you know the mower model, it's just as easy to order a new air filter online. If the air filter is foam, wash it in soap and water. Rinse and squeeze it dry. Some manuals suggest you also oil a foam filter with engine oil. If so, squeeze the filter dry again before you reinstall it.

These easy steps can give you a trouble-free mowing season.

SOURCE: www.consumerreports.org

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LAWN IRRIGATION



By Scott Grooms

Turfgrasses, like all living plants, require water for growth and survival. Since rainfall patterns vary, seasonal droughts are common in South Carolina. During long, dry hot periods in the summer, there are two choices when it comes to lawn irrigation: water the grass to keep it green, or do not water and watch the lawn turn brown and dormant.

If you choose to allow the lawn to go dormant, make sure the lawn is well-established. If so the lawn can be allowed to go dormant without serious injury, a newly established lawn with a limited root system may be severely injured or killed.

Irrigation is the most efficient way to water a lawn. When water becomes unavailable, your lawn will exhibit a bluish-gray cast. Another way to detect low water levels is to walk across your lawn late in the day and examine the lawn behind you to see if your steps left any footprints. Your footprints will appear in a lawn when the grass plants are in need of water. If your footprints remain for an extended period of time, the lawn should be watered to prevent the grass from becoming dormant.

During dry periods, check if the grass leaves show wilting, rolling or folding. Watering is necessary to prevent the turfgrass from turning brown and becoming dormant.

To check for dry soil, press a screwdriver into the lawn. If the soil is very dry, it will be difficult to push the screwdriver into the ground. Use this test to confirm the results of the other visual methods to help judge when you should water the lawn.

If your lawn is exhibiting these symptoms of drought, apply half an inch of water on

coarse, sandy soil and one inch of water on heavy or fine-textured soil. If you cannot apply the entire amount at once because of water running off from the lawn, allow the water to soak in before you continue. Determine the depth of penetration with the “screwdriver test.” If you have a portable sprinkler, you can move it frequently to avoid surface runoff and excessive watering.

Once you water, do not water again until you observe water deficiency symptoms. Never water the grass every day except during the establishment of newly seeded, sodded, or sprigged lawns. Watering every day with a small amount will encourage a shallow root system, making the grass less drought tolerant. Try to stretch the interval between waterings to as many days as possible to encourage the development of deep, extensive roots. Once you begin to water, continue watering. Encouraging the lawn to break dormancy and then not watering again will exhaust the plants and can cause injury.

Water early in the morning; it is the most efficient time. Water evaporation is minimized so that a high proportion of the applied water is used by the grass plants. Also, early morning irrigation may curtail the development and spread of diseases. You may have no control over when you can water if you use municipal water, since you may have to schedule watering to avoid peak residential water use.

Knowing the amount of water an irrigation system applies over a certain time period is an important step in using water efficiently. Most people irrigate for a given number of minutes without knowing how much water they are really applying. If you see water puddling or running off reduce your amount of watering time.

Another way to water your lawn more efficiently is to reduce overspray, watering areas that are not grass. This can cause substantial damage to hardscapes, decks, patios, fountains, decorative concrete, and driveways.

Drip irrigation is another technique to water shrubbery, these systems consist of plastic pipes with emitters that deliver water directly to the plants roots and is not wasted on areas that do not need to be watered.

Drip irrigation can be used to water shrubs, trees, perennials, annuals and even vegetable gardens and potted plants.

Irrigation system maintenance is necessary to ensure the most efficient use of water that is being applied. Irrigation controllers should be checked at the beginning of each growing season before running sprinklers for the first time.

Programming: Set-up an irrigation schedule. Consult your county extension offices for irrigation schedules that are

directly applicable to your county.

Inspect Sprinkler System: Once the irrigation schedule is programmed, inspect the sprinkler system by checking the valves, sprinkler heads, and emitters. Before running the system, remove the last sprinkler head in each line and let the water run for a few minutes to flush out any dirt and debris. Replace the sprinkler head and turn the system on, running one valve at a time.

Inspect Drip System: As with sprinkler systems, flush the drip system before running it by removing the emitters and letting water run through the tubing for a few minutes to flush out any dirt and debris. Replace emitters and run the system, one valve at a time, to check for problems.

Check Your System: Check your water system at the start of the season to adjust any heads and make sure there was no damage over the winter.

SOURCE: hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/watering-lawns/



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PLANTING FLOWERS WITH YOUR VEGETABLES



By Dana Erickson

When I was significantly younger, my Mom and Dad had a garden every year. My brother and I helped. Neither one of us was too thrilled about that (it was hot out there and there were bugs!), but since we got to eat from the garden we helped tend to it.

One of the things I remember about the garden vividly is the sunflowers that were planted on either end. I just thought my mom liked sunflowers, but now as I am older and hopefully wiser, I see they were more than just a pretty flower.

According to gardenia.net sunflowers help support your garden and its growth. Sunflowers attract bees and butterflies and other insects considered pollinators as well. The blooms of the sunflowers are abundant with nectar which attracts these types of insects and in turn they assist with pollinating the garden.

The sunflowers also help to attract insects that naturally control pests that

could damage your garden. Ladybugs and lacewings are some of the insects that protect against pests such as aphids and mites.

Sunflowers also assist the smaller bird population by providing them with a place to nest. They also enjoy the sunflower seeds on offer. Free room and board! The seeds are also part of the harvest for people as well.

Soil also benefits from sunflowers presence. The sunflowers help to aerate the soil, which improves drainage and the structure of the soil. Sunflowers are also known to help with cleaning up soil that has been contaminated with harmful substances. The vegetables that have climbing vines are glad for the assist. Sunflowers have sturdy stalks which provide support for the vegetable and the large heads can provide shade for other plants.

Sunflowers are beautiful and versatile and are a good farmer's assistant for your garden.

SUMMER PEST-PROOFING TIPS

By Scott Grooms

Summer is a great time of year, but it also invites unwanted pests into our homes. Ants, roaches, mosquitoes, and rodents can disrupt our peace and comfort. Here are a few simple tips to keep these unwanted guests away from your home.

One of the most effective ways to prevent pests from entering your home is by sealing any cracks and crevices. Inspect your windows, doors, and utility openings for gaps and use weatherstripping, caulk, or other appropriate sealants to close them off. Pay special attention to areas where pipes and wires enter your home, as these are common entry points for pests. Blocking these access points will create a barrier that keeps unwanted pests outside where they belong.

A clean kitchen is crucial to deter pests. Ants and other insects attracted to food sources will not be as easily attracted to a clean kitchen. Wipe up spills promptly, store food in airtight containers, and ensure garbage cans are tightly sealed. Regularly empty and clean your trash receptacles to prevent odors that can attract pests. By maintaining a clean and tidy kitchen, you eliminate potential food sources and make your home less appealing to pests.

Stagnant water serves as a breeding ground for mosquitoes and other insects. Eliminate any standing water sources around your property. Check for areas where water can accumulate, such as clogged

gutters, birdbaths, flowerpots, and outdoor containers. Also check empty flowerpots, old tires and buckets that could hold water. Regularly empty and clean these areas to prevent mosquitoes from multiplying and invading your outdoor space. You can significantly reduce the number of biting insects and enjoy a more peaceful summer by removing their source of breeding.

It is also important to periodically check your attic or crawl spaces for any signs of rodents. Inspect for droppings, nesting materials, or gnawed wires, these can indicate the presence of rodents. Take caution when exploring these spaces and consider using gloves, masks, and protective clothing. The steps will protect you from potential health hazards.

Severe pest infestations or persistent problems do occur. In this case, it's wise to consider hiring a professional pest control service. Pest control experts have the knowledge, experience, and tools to address and eradicate pest issues. They can provide targeted treatments, identify potential problem areas, and offer preventative measures to keep the pests away from your home. Consulting with a professional pest control service can be a worthwhile investment for long-term pest control.

Nobody likes to find a pest in their home. Taking a few easy steps and periodic inspections can help with a pest free summer.

SOURCE: www.shjune.com/blog/summer-pest-proofing-tips-for-south-carolina/



10 THINGS TO LOOK FOR WHEN HIRING A DESIGN PROFESSIONAL



1. **Experience:** There is no substitute for experience.
2. **An Office:** Your first meeting should be in a professional's office.
3. **Examples of Work:** While in a designer's office ask to see some of their latest work.
4. **Reference Materials:** Today's design professionals must stay on the cutting edge of their profession to compete.
5. **Finished Projects:** Ask to see photographs and request addresses of actual homes that have been built in a design similar to the one you are considering.
6. **References:** Try to obtain a current list of former clients who you may contact to discuss the designer's past performance.

7. **Contract:** A professional building designer always has a contract or agreement for your review that covers such items as the fee and terms of payment, as well as the specific services that will be rendered for specified fees.
8. **Professional Affiliation:** Makes a statement that this individual maintains high moral and professional standards within the building design profession.
9. **Seals on Drawings:** You don't have to seek an engineer after you leave your designer; your plans are stamped by a registered engineer.
10. **Continuing Education:** Vital for building designers to improve their professionalism and to stay informed of the many advances in the building and design industries.

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GAS VS BATTERY LAWN AND GARDEN EQUIPMENT WHICH ONE WINS THE BATTLE

By Dana Erickson

There are people who swear by one or the other in this arena. As with most everything there are pros and cons to gas and battery powered lawn care equipment. Consumer Reports was founded in 1936 and has been a source of comparison shopping for the general public for some time. Here is Tobie Stranger's from Consumer Reports assessment of the gas vs battery debate.

When it comes to maintenance and storage the battery-powered mowers/equipment seem to have an advantage. Gas units have to be refilled occasionally and then when the season is over the tanks must either be drained or the fuel must be winterized. Monitoring the spark plugs for replacement and changing the oil and air filters are a must to keep the mower/equipment running smoothly. Storage and maintenance for the battery-powered units is less intensive. The blades will need re-sharpening at times, but aside from that after season is almost maintenance free. However, the batteries for the equipment cannot be stored in extreme temperatures; hot or cold. Another advantage the battery-powered mower has is some units may be stored vertically clearing up additional space in the garage.

As for run time, gas mowers are the clear winner. If there is fuel, the mower will continue on. The electric mowers are making up some ground in this area, however. Consumer Reports testing revealed two-thirds of the walk-behind mowers tested could cut the average size lawn in the U.S. (a quarter acre) in one charge. Batteries are continuing to improve and some of the zero-turn mowers are able to cut an acre of grass on one charge. Some can run for close to two hours which is enough time to be able to cut two acres.

Noise pollution and environmental issues come up in this debate as well. Already, there are some areas in the country that have banned gas outdoor equipment due to air and noise pollution. The electric lawn equipment can offer a solution to the noise pollution. Even

though the electric products make some noise they are far quieter than their gas counterparts.

When looking at cost, electric outdoor equipment is a bit like solar panels and electric cars. They cost more initially, but can save the consumer in the long run.

Batteries must be charged before every use and will eventually need to be replaced. While charging times are improving that time must still be factored into any job one might be doing. The batteries for the electric powered tools are expensive. Coming out of pocket for a spare battery is going to be costly. An advantage to batteries is that they can power multiple electric pieces of equipment whereas gas cannot run all pieces of gas-powered equipment. Gas may run your mowers, but a mixture of gas and oil is needed to run the weedeater.

When testing the gas-powered and battery-operated models Consumer Reports did extensive testing on different mowers on practical use. They also used data from years of testing conducted. Factors looked at included cutting evenness, side discharging, mulching, bagging, handling, and noise. What were the findings? According to Consumer Reports:

"Purely on cutting performance, gas walk-behind mowers slightly outmatch electrics. And pricewise, you're more apt to find a great gas machine for a lower upfront cost. But when it comes to factors including noise, smell, maneuverability, and ease of maintenance, electric mowers have the advantage. Over the long term, models at lower and average prices also can be more cost-effective than gas, even more so if fuel prices rise and batteries continue getting better and cheaper. And if the environment is important to you, this type of mower is the only way to go."

The choice for the average consumer between gas and electric is going to be personal preference and their wallet. Diehards in each corner will insist their product is the best, but those who have to go shopping for one or the other are going to have a lot to consider.

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