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The Vine Line

Though Memphis Botanic Garden remains closed at this time, we are still continuing our mission of 'enhancing lives by connecting people with nature to increase awareness and appreciation of our environment.'

This spring we will be sending out horticultural articles through our Vine Line. Now's the time to start working in Your Own Garden!

Be sure to follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) to see what's blooming at the Garden.

Spring is here and azaleas are starting to bloom!

There is probably not a home in the Memphis area that doesn't have an azalea in the yard. Azaleas are easy to grow requiring shade or semi-shade, even moisture, and acidic soil with a pH around 5.5.

Pruning is easy and should be done for 4-6 weeks after flowering, any pruning after 6 weeks from the end of blooming and next years blooms could be removed. Azaleas grow in a whorl pattern like spokes in a wheel, so to reduce the size of a plant, cut the stem to the whorl where it originates. When reducing the height, no more than 1/3 of the plant should be removed in a season. Good luck and happy gardening.



By Robin Howell, MBG horticulturist

For the Birds



In an earlier draft I attempted to articulate the fact that raising chickens helped me become a better gardener—how it could make you, reader, a better gardener. Somewhere along the way I may have tried to explain how raising these birds made me a better person—forming better habits, sharpening my time management skills, fostering patience, etc. Where I could see myself falling short was in those mentioned matters of the heart, as the only quantifiable aspect—that which can be

compared—is what we see, in the ground, growing.

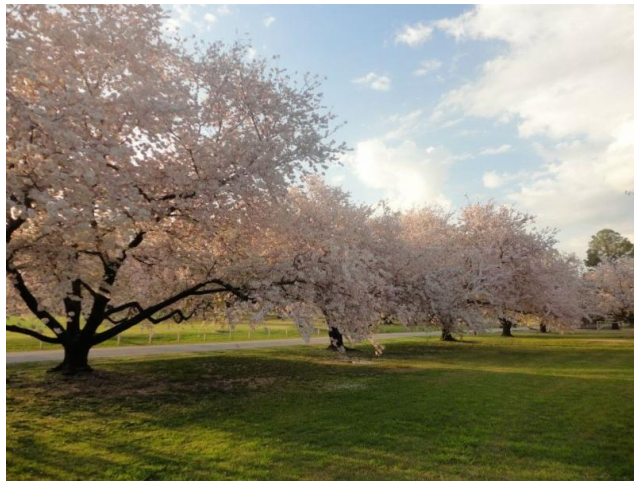
These effects have come to me with varied directness. That which is most direct, and that from which I expect to see more improvement in the future, comes from a hardly likable source: manure. This by-product has a N-P-K (Nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium) ratio of about 1.5-1.0-.5. The bags of composted cow manure you will find at the big box stores is 0.5-0.5-0.5—for comparison. Since compost is mostly carbon and a nitrogen source, the litter on the coop floor—straw + woodshavings + chicken droppings—is a perfect situation for this, indeed. I pile it up, turn it periodically and watch it reduce by half in volume, then half again, and then into black gold. Adding this to raised beds as an amendment and mulch, top dressing around berries and trees, and concocting “compost tea” for seed starts, will all help increase yields, strengthen and invigorate existing plants, and reduce one’s dependency, if they’ve any, on chemical fertilizers—hence better gardening.

By Blair Combest, MBG horticulturist

Why spring flowering plants are hard to predict when they will bloom and for how long

The answer is multifaceted. The weather plays an important part and on a smaller scale gardener timing and plant selection. In regards to the weather, we would be able to predict blooming if we had a normal weather trend meaning a fall with a gradual cooling with no spikes in temperature or cold snaps.

Our past late fall and winter had both extreme cold snaps and unseasonably high temperatures. November 2019 had a sudden cold snap followed by high temperatures in December. This pushes new growth or flowering buds to swell making the plants “think” it’s time to flower.



Day length also plays a part in timing of the plants to bloom. After December 20 the days begin to get longer. This coupled with the cold November and warm December and January again makes the plant think it’s time to bloom.

Spring weather plays a major part in how long the flowers will last on the Cherry Trees, tulip blooms and Japanese Magnolia blooms. If the weather is calm the blooms will last longer. If there is a lot of rain and wind the blooms will be gone or mostly gone with even one storm. Also at this time of year there is the possibility of a late frost and that would also destroy the blooms if they are already in full bloom and we receive a late frost.

The last factor on lasting bloom and when the plants will bloom is the gardeners plant selection and timing on the planting. This mainly applies for bulbs such as the Tulip. Bulbs come in three major categories; early, mid and late seasons. If the gardener selects bulbs that are early blooming they are more susceptible to the weather conditions previously described. So while late season bulbs are not the first to be seen their flowers are going to have a longer bloom time.

Timing on planting bulbs is recommended from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day. So if the gardener planted right after Thanksgiving those bulbs will have seen an early bloom time this year. If the gardener waited until December or January those bulbs will have remained dormant until spring.

So for the question of bloom time and longevity it is mainly up to Mother Nature. We as gardeners have little influence other than species and planting time. Good luck and keep on gardening!

By Jeff Reynolds, MBG horticulturist

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