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About the cover

Mississippi State University landscape architect professor emeritus and Garden Love volunteer Pete Melby and local youths Dezire Moncrief, 16, and Jakayla Williams, 11, pull out weeds to prepare a vegetable bed at the Garden Love youth and children's garden on Long Street on Saturday morning. Once the bed was cleared, the group planted turnip seeds where the weeds had once grown and covered the new seeds with compost. (Photo by Deanna Robinson/Dispatch Staff)

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MOONPIE WAS RIGHT. THESE GUYS ARE BLOOMIN' CRAZY!!!



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Brookville Garden children grow vegetables, earn money in community garden

Garden Love allows community youth to see fruits of their labor

By ABIGAIL SIPE ROCHESTER
arochester@cdispatch.com

STARKVILLE — Before she started helping with Garden Love, 11-year-old Jakayla Williams had only ever tried gardening using the seeds she found in her apples and grapes. None of those seeds ever sprouted.

"I tried to grow an apple tree in my grandma's yard ... behind her house," Williams said. "But it didn't grow. It might not have been enough sunlight."

But on Saturday, Williams was one of a few children working in the community youth and children's garden on Long Street next to the Brookville Garden Apartment complex. Over the past two years she has worked in the garden, Williams has seen flowers and vegetables not only sprout, but grow into something she and her fellow gardeners can sell.

Mississippi State University landscape architect professor emeritus Pete Melby helped to start Garden Love four years ago with help from his wife, Cindy Melby, and other volunteers from Starkville's First United Methodist Church.

"It's enjoyable to me because I'm able to teach and demonstrate to kids how to grow a garden. I did that when I was a kid," Melby said. "I did that with my (daughters).



Deanna Robinson/Dispatch Staff

Mississippi State University landscape architect professor emeritus and Garden Love volunteer Pete Melby points to a sign displaying the vegetables grown in the youth and children's garden throughout the different seasons on Saturday morning. Melby said he helped to create the sign during his time at MSU, though he now uses it to help educate the children from the Brookville Gardens area.

They used to grow zinnias and they would sell them on the weekend. But I never thought it would grow this big."

Cindy said the garden is a part of the church's "Love Project," which includes Laundry Love, Library Love and Garden Love. All three programs serve the Brookville Garden community. Brookville Garden is Section 8 housing, meaning rent is federally subsidized for qualifying low-income tenants.

Pete said the garden branch of the project started when the group noticed an empty lot, owned by Habitat for Humanity, just outside of the complex. After asking for permission, volunteers added a few benches and garden beds, before it started to grow.

Currently, Pete said, Garden Love includes 41 raised beds, including beds to grow vegetables and zinnias in the summer. The beds include

prepared soil and they're drip irrigated, letting the group grow "anything that anybody can envision."

About once a week except during the winter, Pete said, volunteers and youth work together to maintain the garden. The children do all the planting, managing and harvesting, he said, while he and other volunteers come out to offer their gardening know-how and experience.

On Saturday, Pete showed Williams, along with youth gardeners Amiya Moncrief and Dezire Moncrief, how to read seed packets for how deep and far apart to plant radishes and lettuce. He demonstrated a broadcast planting method, scattering them randomly from a few feet above the beds, before allowing the young gardeners to take over themselves.

"When you broadcast, we're going to have seeds ev-



Deanna Robinson/Dispatch Staff

United Methodist Church volunteer Cindy Melby, along with local children Dezire Moncrief, 16, Jakayla Williams, 11, and Amiya Moncrief, 15, plant daffodil bulbs next to Long Street on Saturday morning next to the pathway into the Garden Love youth and children's garden. On Saturday, the group planted the flower bulbs along with seeds for turnips and lettuce, vegetables they will harvest to sell at the Starkville Community Market in just a few weeks.

erywhere," Pete explained. "If you just put them in a row, it's neat, but then, what do you do with that space between the rows? We're utilizing that because we want to grow a lot."

Volunteers and children rotate crops throughout the seasons, Pete said. Typically, they grow carrots, swiss chard, lettuces, onions, potatoes, radishes, spinach and turnips in the spring. Then, in the summer, they switch to green beans, eggplant, cucumbers, okra, yellow squash and cherry tomatoes, along with zinnias. Their fall produce is similar to the spring produce.

Last year, Pete said, the children also started making their own compost out of leaves dropped off by community members. The compost goes back into the garden, but they also bag it up and sell it at the farmers' market.

While the children eat some

of the vegetables, Pete said, all those that don't get eaten are brought to the Starkville Community Market to be sold. The funds are then distributed back to the children.

"We had a State professor of accounting create a formula, and they – depending on the amount of hours they work and how much the produce is sold for – that equals their pay per hour," Pete said. "And that varies from \$5 to \$15 per hour each."

Pete said in the last year, the garden participants sold out of produce almost every time they went to the market. This past year, they sold \$2,850 worth of produce. He said 90% of the money goes directly to the children participating, while 10% goes to the church to teach the children about tithing, though most of that money goes back into paying for more fertilizer and supplies.

Taking the bite out of your power bill

Area utility companies try to help customers keep costs down as rates rise

BY KEVIN EDWARDS

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In winter and summer months, people can find themselves endlessly tinkering with thermostat settings in order to stay comfortable.

However, comfort comes with a price, and keeping your home cool and hot can increase energy bills substantially.

"There's no way that when it gets cold or it gets hot that you're not going to use more power," said Jon Turner, public relations and marketing director for 4-County Electric Power Association. "You just have to understand that and do some things that can mitigate that."

Several mitigation strategies are offered locally.

All three of the major Golden Triangle utility companies – 4-County, Columbus Light and Water and Starkville Utilities – offer a variety of programs to help customers save on their energy bills, especially during the winter and summer months.

These are especially helpful after last year's usage hikes. The average 4-County bill rose to \$121.65, Starkville Utilities to \$108.53 and CLW's to \$182.41 – up between 2.8% and 5.4% from previous averages.

One program offered by 4-County, Turner said, is signing up for daily alerts which notifies customers when their energy usage surpasses a specified threshold.

"We have a system where every day, you can get an e-mail or a text or both ... so that they can kind of see the real effects of what's happening," he said. "And, if there is an issue out there that isn't weather related ... it helps them and us catch it quicker than waiting for the next bill to come out."

How to save on your energy bills

- Unplug devices when done using them
- Placing your TV in "energy saving mode" while not in use
- Turn down water heater to 120 degrees
- Keep thermostat at 68 degrees in the winter and 78 degrees in the summer
- Switch from air conditioning to using fans
- Replace incandescent bulbs with LED lights
- Use caulk or weather stripping to plug up small cracks along walls or windows
- Change and clean air filter regularly
- Open blinds and curtains during the summer, close them during the winter

Another tool is education.

Starkville Utilities General Manager Edward Kemp said regular workshops have been effective in educating customers on how to manage their energy usage. He encourages everyone to attend one.

"We always have people that walk away and say, 'Man, I really learned something in that and I thought I've been doing everything right,'" he said.

He said customers are informed about several factors that influence their bill, aside from setting the thermostat. These include insulation, types of lighting, age of the HVAC unit, doors and types of appliances in the home.

The last round of workshops were held last October and had between 300 and 400 participants across 13 sessions, he said. A new round of workshops are scheduled for April 23-25. Kemp said sign-up information will be released soon.

Attendees at these workshops receive energy tool kits, valued at around \$40, that include items like LED light bulbs and caulk tubes to seal empty spaces.



Stock photo
Caulking around your windows and doors conceals gaps to make it easier for the air in your home to stay at the right temperature for the season which can lead to energy savings.

"And our goal is to really help educate our customers and empower them with the resources and the tools that they need to make good decisions, however they want to manage their utility bills," he said.

Columbus Light and Water arranges similar workshops for customers, General Manager Angela Verdell said.

"Home energy evaluations can be arranged for customers to show how their home use or lose energy," she said. "Evaluations are done in conjunction with (Tennessee Valley Authority) and a third party provider, CLEAResult. We also provide information for (do-it-yourself) home energy assessments to give customers a simple way to check their home's energy efficiency."

To make payments easier, Kemp said SUD's levelized billing program takes a rolling 12-month average of energy usage and "takes out the peaks and the valleys" of a bill. While customers aren't paying the exact same amount each month, the bills are relatively close, he said.

A program offered by 4-County, the low-income home energy assistance program, provides financial assistance to eligible households to help pay the cost of home energy bills and other energy related services.

Verdell said CLW offers the Home



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Replacing a dirty, clogged filter with a clean one can lower your air conditioner's energy consumption by 5% to 15%.

Uplift Program, a partnership with the TVA that upgrades a certain number of homes each year to become more energy efficient.

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Vegetable and Herb Planting dates for Spring

Crop	Start Seeds Indoors		Plant Seedlings or Transplants		Start Seeds Outdoors		Last Date to Plant
Arugula	* Jan 25-Feb 8	☾ Jan 25	* Feb 29-Mar 15		* Feb 22-29	☾ Feb 22-24	Oct 9
Asparagus	N/A		N/A		* Mar 7-22	☾ Mar 7-22	Mar 22
Basil	* Feb 8-22	☾ Feb 9-22	* Apr 5-19	☾ Apr 8-19	* Apr 5-19	☾ Apr 8-19	Sep 25
Beets	N/A		* Mar 7-22	☾ Mar 7-22	* Feb 22-29	☾ Feb 25-29	Apr 5
Bell Peppers	* Jan 11-25	☾ Jan 11-25	* Apr 5-12	☾ Apr 8-12	N/A		Aug 14
Bok Choy	* Feb 8-22	☾ Feb 9-22	* Apr 5-12	☾ Apr 8-12	* Apr 5-12	☾ Apr 8-12	May 3
Broccoli	* Jan 25-Feb 8	☾ Jan 25	* Mar 7-22		* Feb 22-29	☾ Feb 22-24	Sep 4
Brussels Sprouts	* Feb 8-22	☾ Feb 9-22	* Mar 7-22		* Feb 22-29	☾ Feb 22-24	Jul 31
Cabbage	* Jan 25-Feb 8	☾ Jan 25	* Mar 7-22		* Feb 22-29	☾ Feb 22-24	Jul 24
Cantaloupes	* Feb 29-Mar 15		* Mar 22-Apr 5	☾ Mar 22-25	* Mar 29-Apr 5		Jul 31
Carrots	N/A		N/A		* Feb 22-Mar 7	☾ Feb 25-Mar 7	Aug 28
Cauliflower	* Feb 8-22	☾ Feb 9-22	* Mar 15-29	☾ Mar 15-25	N/A		Aug 28
Chervil	* Dec 28-Jan 11	☾ Jan 11	* Mar 29-Apr 12	☾ Apr 8-12	* Mar 22	☾ Mar 22	Aug 28
Celery	* Jan 25-Feb 8	☾ Jan 25	* Feb 29-Mar 7		* Feb 29-Mar 7		Sep 11
Cilantro (Coriander)	N/A		N/A		* Mar 22-Apr 5	☾ Mar 22-25	Apr 12
Collards	* Feb 8-22	☾ Feb 9-22	* Mar 7-22		* Feb 29-Mar 7		Aug 28
Corn	N/A		N/A		* Apr 5-19	☾ Apr 8-19	Aug 21
Cucumbers	* Feb 29-Mar 7		* Mar 29-Apr 12	☾ Apr 8-12	* Apr 5-12	☾ Apr 8-12	Aug 28
Dill	N/A		N/A		* Mar 15-Apr 5	☾ Mar 15-25	Sep 11
Dry Beans	N/A		N/A		* Apr 5-12	☾ Apr 8-12	Jul 31
Eggplants	* Jan 25-Feb 8	☾ Jan 25	* Apr 5-12	☾ Apr 8-12	N/A		Aug 28
Fava Beans (Broad Beans)	N/A		N/A		* Feb 22-29	☾ Feb 22-24	Apr 5
Fennel	* Feb 8-22	☾ Feb 9-22	* Mar 29-Apr 5		* Mar 22-Apr 5	☾ Mar 22-25	Aug 21
Green Beans	N/A		N/A		* Mar 29-Apr 19	☾ Apr 8-19	Aug 28
Jalapeño Peppers	* Jan 11-25	☾ Jan 11-25	* Apr 5-12	☾ Apr 8-12	N/A		
Kale	* Jan 25-Feb 8	☾ Jan 25	* Mar 7-22		* Feb 22-29	☾ Feb 22-24	Apr 5
Kohlrabi	* Feb 8-22	☾ Feb 9-22	* Feb 29-Mar 7		* Feb 22-29	☾ Feb 22-24	Apr 5
Leeks	* Jan 11-25	☾ Jan 11-25	* Feb 29-Mar 15		N/A		Jul 24
Lettuce	* Feb 8-22	☾ Feb 9-22	* Feb 29-Mar 7		* Feb 22-29	☾ Feb 22-24	Apr 5
Mustard Greens	N/A		N/A		N/A		
Okra	* Feb 22-Mar 7	☾ Feb 22-24	* Apr 5-12	☾ Apr 8-12	* Apr 5-19	☾ Apr 8-19	Aug 28
Onion Sets	N/A		* Feb 22-Mar 7	☾ Feb 25-Mar 7	N/A		Jul 31
Oregano	* Jan 11-Feb 8	☾ Jan 11-25	* Mar 29-Apr 12	☾ Apr 8-12	N/A		Aug 28
Parsley	* Jan 11-25	☾ Jan 11-25	* Mar 29-Apr 12	☾ Apr 8-12	* Feb 22-Mar 29	☾ Feb 22-24	Aug 21
Parsnips	N/A		N/A		* Feb 22-29	☾ Feb 25-29	Jul 31
Peas	N/A		N/A		* Feb 22-29	☾ Feb 22-24	Apr 5
Potatoes	N/A		N/A		* Feb 22-Mar 7	☾ Feb 25-Mar 7	Aug 28
Pumpkins	* Feb 29-Mar 15		* Apr 5-12	☾ Apr 8-12	* Apr 5-12	☾ Apr 8-12	Jul 24
Radishes	N/A		N/A		* Feb 22-29	☾ Feb 25-29	Sep 11
Rosemary	* Dec 28-Jan 11	☾ Jan 11	* Apr 5-12	☾ Apr 8-12	N/A		Sep 11
Sage	* Jan 25-Feb 8	☾ Jan 25	* Mar 29-Apr 12	☾ Apr 8-12	N/A		Aug 21
Salsify	N/A		N/A		* Feb 22-Mar 7	☾ Feb 25-Mar 7	Jul 31
Spinach	* Feb 8-22	☾ Feb 9-22	* Feb 29-Mar 7		* Feb 22-29	☾ Feb 22-24	Apr 5
Sweet Potatoes	N/A		N/A		* Apr 5-19	☾ Apr 5-7	Jul 24
Swiss Chard	* Feb 8-22	☾ Feb 9-22	* Mar 7-22		* Feb 29-Mar 22	☾ Mar 16-22	Apr 5
Thyme	* Jan 11-25	☾ Jan 11-25	* Mar 29-Apr 5		N/A		Aug 14
Tomatillos	* Feb 8-22	☾ Feb 9-22	* Apr 5-19	☾ Apr 8-19	N/A		Aug 21
Tomatoes	* Jan 25-Feb 8	☾ Jan 25	* Apr 5-12	☾ Apr 8-12	N/A		Aug 7
Turnips	N/A		N/A		* Feb 22-29	☾ Feb 25-29	Oct 9
Watermelons	* Feb 29-Mar 15		* Apr 5-12	☾ Apr 8-12	* Mar 29-Apr 5		Aug 7
Winter Squash	* Feb 29-Mar 7		* Mar 29-Apr 12	☾ Apr 8-12	* Apr 5-12	☾ Apr 8-12	Jul 17
Zucchini and Summer Squash	* Feb 29-Mar 7		* Mar 29-Apr 12	☾ Apr 8-12	* Apr 5-12	☾ Apr 8-12	Sep 4

On average, the last spring frost occurs on March 22.

* **Frost dates** — indicate the best planting dates based on your local average frost dates. Average frost dates are based on historical weather data and are the planting guideline used by most gardeners.

☾ **Moon dates** — indicate the best planting dates based on your local frost dates and Moon phases. Planting by the Moon is considered a more traditional technique.

What Is Planting by the Moon?

Planting by the Moon (also called "Gardening by the Moon") is a traditional way to plant your above- and below-ground crops, especially at the start of the season.

Here's how it works:

Plant annual flowers and vegetables that bear crops above ground during the light, or waxing, of the Moon. In other words, plant from the day the Moon is new until the day it is full.

Plant flowering bulbs, biennial and perennial flowers, and vegetables that bear crops below ground during the dark, or waning, of the Moon. In other words, plant from the day after the Moon is full until the day before it is new again.

Old-time farmers swear that this practice results in a larger, tastier harvest, so we've included planting by the Moon dates in our planting calendar, too.

Vegetable Planting dates for Fall

Crop	Start Seeds Outdoors		Transplant	Average Days to Maturity	Frost Tolerance
	* Sep 18-Oct 23	☾ Oct 2-17			
Arugula	* Sep 18-Oct 23	☾ Oct 2-17	N/A	40	Frost-hardy
Beets	* Aug 14-Sep 11	☾ Aug 20-Sep 1	N/A	50	Frost-tolerant
Bok Choy	* Aug 28-Sep 18	☾ Sep 2-17	N/A	50	Frost-tolerant
Broccoli	* Aug 7-14	☾ Aug 7-14	* Aug 28-Sep 11	☾ Sep 2-11	60 Frost-tolerant
Brussels Sprouts	* Jul 17-31	☾ Jul 17-21	N/A	100	Frost-hardy
Cabbage	* Aug 7-14	☾ Aug 7-14	* Aug 28-Sep 4	☾ Sep 2-4	90 Frost-tolerant
Carrots	* Aug 21-28	☾ Aug 21-28	N/A	70	Frost-tolerant
Cauliflower	* Jul 31-Aug 7	☾ Aug 4-7	* Aug 14-21	☾ Aug 14-19	75 Frost-tolerant
Chives	* Aug 14-Sep 11	☾ Aug 14-19, Sep 2-11	N/A	70	Frost-tolerant
Fennel	* Aug 7-21	☾ Aug 7-19	N/A	80	Tender
Garlic	* Nov 20-Dec 4	☾ Nov 20-30	N/A	120	Frost-hardy
Green Beans	* Aug 21-Sep 4	☾ Sep 2-4	N/A	55	Tender
Kale	* Aug 28-Sep 11	☾ Sep 2-11	N/A	60	Frost-hardy
Kohlrabi	* Sep 4-25	☾ Sep 4-17	N/A	45	Frost-tolerant
Lettuce	* Aug 28-Sep 11	☾ Sep 2-11	N/A	60	Frost-tolerant
Mustard Greens	* Sep 4-25	☾ Sep 4-17	N/A	45	Tender
Peas	* Aug 28-Sep 11	☾ Sep 2-11	N/A	55	Tender
Radishes	* Sep 25-Oct 9	☾ Sep 25-Oct 1	N/A	25	Frost-tolerant
Spinach	* Sep 18-Oct 9	☾ Oct 2-9	N/A	30	Frost-hardy
Swiss Chard	* Aug 28-Sep 11	☾ Sep 2-11	N/A	60	Frost-tolerant
Turnips	* Sep 4-18	☾ Sep 18	N/A	50	Frost-tolerant

On average, the first frost occurs on November 6.

When to plant Bulbs

Bulbs to plant in the fall	Bulbs to plant in the spring
Allium	Begonia (tuberous)
Anemone	Caladium
Bluebell (Hyacinthoides)	Calla Lily
Crocus	Canna
Daffodil	Dahlia
Fritillaria	Daylily*
Glory-of-the-Snow (Chionodoxa)	Crocsmia
Grape Hyacinth (Muscari)	Elephant Ear
Hyacinth (Hyacinthus)	Freesia
Iris*	Gladiolus
Snowdrop (Galanthus)	Lily, Asiatic/Oriental (Lillium)
Squill (Scilla)	
Tulip	

* This hardy perennial may be planted in the spring or fall.

Caring for Bulbs

Wait until spring-flowering bulbs have finished blooming and their foliage has died back before digging, dividing, or moving them around. Mark their locations with brightly-colored popsicle sticks so you can find them more easily in late summer or early fall, which is the time to divide and transplant.

Fall is also the time to dig up summer-flowering bulbs that need to be stored inside for winter.

When to start Perennial Flower Seeds

Flower	Start Seeds Indoors	Plant Outdoors
	(Weeks BEFORE last SPRING frost date)	
Anise Hyssop	8-10 weeks	On last frost date
Asclepias (Milkweed)	10-12 weeks	1-2 weeks after last frost
Catmint	8-10 weeks	On last frost date
Columbine	8-10 weeks	On last frost date
Coreopsis	8-10 weeks	On last frost date
Daisy	10-12 weeks	1-2 weeks before last frost
Delphinium (perennial)	10-12 weeks	1-2 weeks before last frost
Dianthus	10-12 weeks	1-2 weeks before last frost
Echinacea (Coneflower)	8-10 weeks	On last frost date
Foxglove (Digitalis)	10-12 weeks	1-2 weeks after last frost
Gaillardia	8-10 weeks	On last frost date
Helianthus	8-10 weeks	On last frost date
Heliopsis	10-12 weeks	1-2 weeks after last frost
Hibiscus	8-10 weeks	1-2 weeks after last frost
Hollyhock	8-10 weeks	On last frost date
Monarda (Bee Balm)	8-10 weeks	On last frost date
Phlox (perennial)	10-12 weeks	1-2 weeks after last frost
Rudbeckia (Black-Eyed Susan)	8-10 weeks	1-2 weeks before last frost
Thyme	8-10 weeks	On last frost date
Viola	8-10 weeks	1-2 weeks before last frost
Yarrow	8-10 weeks	On last frost date

Saving seeds for next year

In the fall, save your zinnia seeds, sunflower seeds, and more. Remember that after flowers bloom, their seeds remain, containing the promise of spring. Many old-fashioned annuals grow quite well from seeds collected and stored at home.

Perennial seeds can also be saved. Just keep in mind that some perennials may take a couple years from seed to maturity.

When to start Annual Flower Seeds

Flower	Start Seeds Indoors	Plant Outdoors
	(Weeks BEFORE last SPRING frost date)	
Allium	6-8 weeks	On last frost date
Ageratum	6-8 weeks	On last frost date
Alyssum	6-8 weeks	1-2 weeks before last frost
Aster	6-8 weeks	On last frost date
Bachelor Button	6-8 weeks	On last frost date
Calendula	6-8 weeks	1-2 weeks before last frost
Celosia	6-8 weeks	On last frost date
Coleus	8-10 weeks	1-2 weeks after last frost
Cosmos	6-8 weeks	On last frost date
Delphinium (annual)	6-8 weeks	1-2 weeks before last frost
Gomphrena	6-8 weeks	On last frost date
Impatiens	8-10 weeks	1-2 weeks after last frost
Marigolds	6-8 weeks	On last frost date
Morning Glory*	3-4 weeks	After last frost
Nicotiana	6-8 weeks	On last frost date
Petunia	8-10 weeks	On last frost date
Phlox (annual)	8-10 weeks	On last frost date
Salvia	6-8 weeks	On last frost date
Scabiosa	6-8 weeks	On last frost date
Snapdragon	8-10 weeks	On last frost date
Statice	6-8 weeks	On last frost date
Stock	8-10 weeks	On last frost date
Strawflower	6-8 weeks	On last frost date
Sunflower*	3-4 weeks	1-2 weeks after last frost
Verbena	8-10 weeks	On last frost date
Zinnia*	4-6 weeks	1-2 weeks after last frost

* These fast-growing annuals are often started outdoors after the danger of frost has passed.



Meet Our Manager, Bryant Byrd

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- Grew up in Sulligent, AL
- Earned a Bachelor of Science in Horticulture and Master of Agriculture in Entomology at Auburn University
- Worked at Walton's for a year and a half, managed the Columbus location since July 2023
- I love working at Walton's because of the opportunity to build an emotionally safe, fun, and education focused work environment.
- My favorite part of the job is assisting customers with diagnosing plant health/pest issues they may encounter. The diversity of customers we experience provides a never ending opportunity to learn, grow, and gain new perspectives.

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USDA zone map changes likely won't affect local gardeners

No material changes to what can be planted or when

BY BRIAN JONES
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Just because things change, it doesn't necessarily mean they're different. Take the new United States Department of Agriculture plant hardiness zone map, for example.

The map is designed to show growers – whether gardeners or farmers – the average temperature in their area, so they can better pick and choose what plants to grow and when to plant. In late 2023, it was updated for the first time in more than a decade, and Mississippi saw some changes.

Zones are based on the 30-year average for lowest winter temperature. The designations do not reflect record cold temperatures in that area, but simply the average low temperature over that period.

Each zone on the map represents a change of 10 degrees, and it is further divided into half-zones representing increases of 5 degrees.

According to a USDA press release, about half the country shifted a half zone up the chart, meaning the average lowest temperature increased by as much as 5 degrees since the map was last updated in 2012.

Much of Mississippi is now in zone 8b, which previously only covered about six counties in the southern reaches of the state. All Oktibbeha County is entirely in Zone 8a (part of it used to be in 7b) and much of Lowndes is in zone 8b, an area that previously included the middle of the state.

While that may sound alarming, it won't make a lot of difference for home gardeners, according to Mississippi State University Extension Agent Josh Tilley.

"It's not going to change anything as

far as what plants we can plant here in Columbus and our area," Tilley said.

Gardeners generally know what their local microclimate is like and how to best work within it, Tilley said.

"As far as what plants to plant here, people around here typically know what works here and what doesn't," Tilley said. "I don't think it's going to change any kind of recommendations we make (about growing)."

What to plant and when to plant it will be driven by the local weather, as usual, Tilley said.

"The window (for planting) is going to depend on the weather from year to year," Tilley said. "Any time you plant, whether it's a vegetable garden or commodities, it all depends on weather and moisture in the ground and stuff like that. Sometimes you get too much (spring) moisture and it pushes you back, other times you have just the right amount and you can roll early."

Bryant Byrd, Columbus manager for Walton's Greenhouse, agreed that the impact would be minimal.

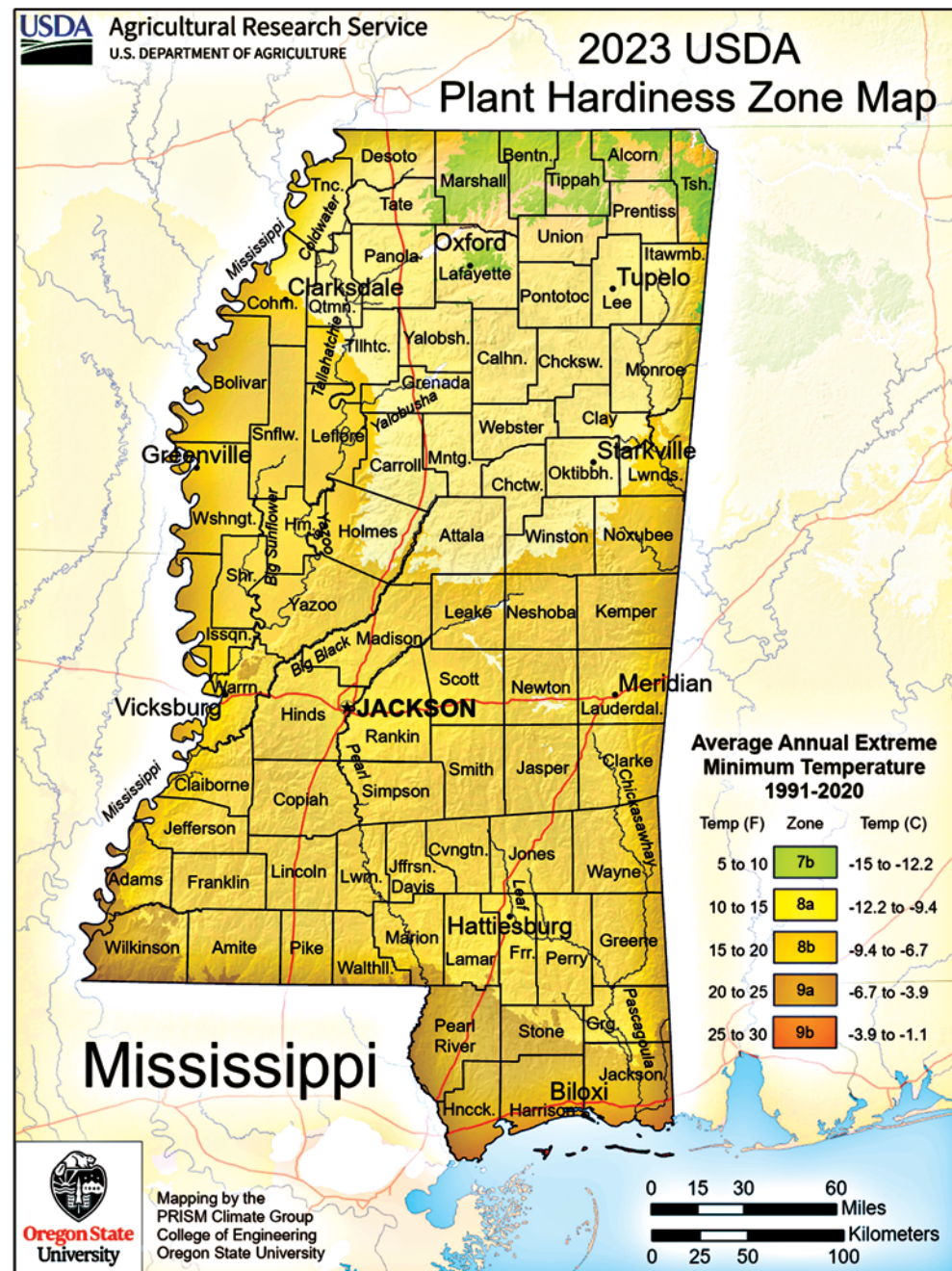
"It's not going to make a huge difference," Byrd said. "If the temperatures continue to increase, then that will have a long-term local effect. But we are still in Zone 8 for the most part, so it's only a 5- to 10- degree fluctuation (in average lowest temperature)."

Many plants for sale at big box-style stores are tagged by minimum zone to maximum zone, Byrd said.

"Most of those tags won't go into whether you're in zone A or zone B," Byrd said. "They just say, for example, zones 5-8. Most plants are harder than people expect."

Changes in the hardiness map were in part driven by the fact that the USDA has access to a lot more data than it used to, Tilley said.

"The USDA has opportunities to collect a lot more data than they did previously," Tilley said. "There's a whole lot more information on local temperature variations than there used to be."



According to a USDA press release, the number of weather stations has roughly doubled over the last 10 years.

"The 2023 map incorporates data from 13,412 weather stations (nationally) compared to 7,983 that were used

for the 2012 map," the release said. "... Some changes in the zonal boundaries are also the result of using increasingly sophisticated mapping methods and the inclusion of data from more weather stations."

Building a custom home? Read these tips first

StatePoint Media

Many people dream of building a custom home in a beautiful location. However, the journey of building a home from scratch is not always smooth.

“As a builder in sunny Southwest Florida, we work with all kinds of clients. Whether they are drawn to the timeless appeal of Naples, the coastal charm of Bonita Springs, the urban energy of Tampa, or the peaceful embrace of Sanibel, our job is to help them create their dream home and tell their unique story,” says Glen Harris III, regional partner of Alair Florida, an industry leader.

To help you navigate the intricate world of custom home-building, Alair Florida is shedding light on some common challenges prospective homeowners face and offering solutions based on their expertise.

Creating a custom home is an exciting journey with both triumphs and trials. Here are some common concerns:

1. Balancing vision and budget:

Challenge: Juggling expansive design ideas with realistic budget constraints.

Solution: Overall project costs can be unpredictable with a standard cost-plus contract, particularly if you have an expansive vision. That’s why it’s important to work with a builder who encourages a pre-construction phase, whereby specifications and line-item costs are fixed. This process allows you to make design adjustments on paper before construction begins, and in turn,

your builder will present you with a fixed cost-plus contract. As the project moves forward, be sure to request regular updates and clear project timelines.

2. Navigating regulatory terrain:

Challenge: Dealing with the complex world of permits and regulations often causes delays.

Solution: Work with a builder who possesses local knowledge. Doing so can streamline the process as they will understand and adhere to specific requirements.

3. Timing the sourcing of materials:

Challenge: Excitement of hand-selecting materials tempered by potential supply chain disruptions.

Solution: If your builder is experienced in material sourcing and high-quality craftsmanship, this will help them navigate such challenges to avoid delays while ensuring your new home is built to the highest standards.

4. Adapting to evolving design:

Challenge: The temptation of design changes impacting the project timeline.

Solution: Striking a balance between innovation and sticking to the timeline is crucial for success. Your builder should act as your trusted advisor, connecting you with savvy designers, architects and other experts who understand the local market and the range of other factors that can affect your timeline.

5. Unforeseen costs and delays:

Challenge: Unexpected challenges despite meticulous planning.

Solution: Establishing a contingency fund and maintaining open communication with your builder is prudent.

Cozy or cramped? Americans reveal how they feel about living in small spaces

StatePoint Media

When it comes to the home, bigger doesn’t always mean better.

A new survey from Duck brand, which offers products that provide simple, imaginative and helpful solutions for a variety of tasks around the home, discovers that more than half of Americans living in a small space say they feel cozy and comfortable as opposed to cramped.

“We often assume that a larger home is the most desirable, but that’s not always the case,” says Chaffy Assad, product manager at Shurtape Technologies, LLC, the company that markets the Duck brand. “In fact, nearly half of the survey respondents enjoy living in a small space, which most defined as a two-bedroom home or smaller.”

A more intimate space offers many benefits: 61% say it’s easier to clean, 54% say it costs less and helps save money and 52% say it’s easier to maintain. Additionally, 57% plan to continue living in their home for the foreseeable future.

To that end, your builder should take a client-driven approach and actively involve you in the decision-making process.

While there are many benefits to tinier homes, there are some challenges to living with less space. Fifty-nine percent of Americans say the biggest downside is the lack of storage, with 48% of people feeling it’s harder to keep small spaces clean and organized compared to larger spaces.

Which areas prove to create the biggest cleaning conundrums? The kitchen ranks number one as the hardest room to keep neat and tidy, with the living room a close second, followed by the bedroom in third. The belongings that are the most difficult to make space for are cookware, bags, shoes and gym equipment.

That being said, Americans are good at finding ways to make the most of their home by keeping clutter to a minimum and getting creative with organizing, the survey finds. Duck brand offers a variety of organizing ideas and solutions that help people tidy up, from the EasyMounts Mounting System that can transform a disorganized entryway, closet or garage, to the versatile EasyLiner Brand Shelf Liner that can make surfaces stylish and mess-free.

With careful attention and industry expertise, guided by a trusted custom home builder, you can transform your vision into reality.

4 trends to take muted interiors from drab to dreamy in 2024

StatePoint Media

While neutral tones continue to be popular this year among home DIYers, bold and colorful surroundings also are trending right now.

From adding dramatic style to the kitchen to giving an unexpected space a splash of color, these ideas—inspired by the 2024 FrogTape Design Trends, as identified by celebrity interior designer Taniya Nayak—will make areas around your home pop in 2024.

Colorful Kitchens. Make the kitchen

a focal point by painting the cabinets or panels on the island a vivid color. Calming blue will ensure a relaxed and laid-back feeling, while fuchsia will energize the design. Nayak recommends using FrogTape Delicate Surface Painter’s Tape to prevent paint bleed and achieve crisp paint lines. The low-adhesion tape is designed to prevent damage on surfaces like cabinets, freshly painted walls, wallpaper and more.

Dynamic Décor. If painting projects aren’t in the plan for this year, revive a living room or bedroom by adding a col-

lection of brightly colored pillows and throws, bohemian-style macramé, wall art and a rug with geometric patterns. As long as the colors are complementary to each other, the blend of styles and textures will catch the eye and make the room feel refreshed with little effort.

Nourishing Green. A simple, but effective, way to boost the mood of a space is to fill it with large blooms. Place a modern plant stand in an empty corner or between rooms as a divider, and layer in green houseplants or ones with colorful leaves on the shelves. Accentu-

ate the greenery with pops of the same color throughout the room to create a sense of cohesion.

Elevated Exteriors. It’s not just the interiors of the home that should speak to personal style, the outside should, too! Give the front door a facelift by painting it a daring color. Don’t be afraid to choose one hue for the outside of the door and another for the inside. For this project, apply FrogTape Multi-Surface Painter’s Tape before painting, so that trim around the door and doorknob is protected from paint bleed.



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