

Things to do in the Landscape January 2007



Happy New Year to everyone from the staff at the Pinellas County Extension Office and the Florida Botanical Gardens!

New Year's Resolutions are easy to make and also easy to break. One resolution we always try to keep in the one about spending as much time as possible out of doors enjoying the great Florida weather. Winter and spring are the best times to do a lot of renovation in the landscape. Deciduous shade and fruit trees can be pruned. Winter and spring annuals are planted for a show of color and hardy plants are added to the landscape.

Even though winter is a dormant period for most hardy plants, they will still need to be handled properly to insure healthy growth in the spring. Many trees and shrubs die before they even get a chance to leaf out because of improper planting. Until new roots have formed and the plants are anchored firmly in the ground, it may be necessary to use stakes for support. Even if the plant does not fall over, the constant shifting of the root system keeps the plant under stress.

Avoid extremes in watering new plants. Too little water may cause tender roots to dry up and die, while too much water can encourage rotting. New plants should be watered in well when placed in the ground during the winter. Water only when the soil surface is dry which will be every second or third day for the first week. Water twice the second week, then weekly watering should be sufficient until new growth begins in the spring. The amount of water a plant needs is the amount that the soil can absorb. Stop watering when water is not longer seeping into the soil rapidly. Newly planted shrubs and trees should not require fertilization for several months. Give them time to get settled and ready for growth.

The third Friday in January is **Arbor Day**. Planting of trees in backyards, and along city streets has taken place since colonial days. Now, as then, our investment in trees is returning an almost infinite number of benefits and services for man and Mother Earth. To affix a price tag to an urban tree is virtually impossible. In fact, in benefits and services, the value of trees in densely populated areas far exceeds the price we pay for their establishment and maintenance. Trees provide much of the oxygen that we breathe

and they consume large amounts of carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas) during photosynthesis.

Houseplants must have light to live. While some plants can exist on low light, most need a fair amount. Some plants will not survive, much less thrive, without bright light. It is important to find out about the light needs for your particular plant.

In general, foliage plants require less light than flowering plants. Plants not receiving sufficient light may become tall and weak-looking with pale leaves which may drop off. Flowers may also fail to form.

Don't wait too long to move your plant to a more lighted area or it may never recover. On the other hand, don't make the mistake of thinking that placing your indoor plants out in the direct sun will help them recover more quickly. Your plant may end up with sunburned leaves.

Citrus spray schedule. January, often referred to as an optional month when spraying citrus trees has become more important in the past few years. Citrus scab, rust mites, and nutritional deficiencies are three problems which need correcting before they cause extensive damage. Neutral copper for scab, Malathion for scales, whitefly and mites and minor elements can all be combined and sprayed at the same time. Follow label directions for the correct amount to use. If you prefer a less toxic approach for scale, whiteflies and mites, use horticultural oil after the copper and minor element spray.

Watch for anthracnose on **mango** blooms this month. This disease appears as small, black, sunken areas on the flower spike. If left unchecked, it can kill the flowers, preventing the development of fruit. Begin treatment with copper fungicide when the bloom spikes first appear and continue spraying at weekly intervals until the fruit is fully formed, then spray monthly until June or July.

Now is a good time to grow some of your own **vegetables**. There are several things you can do to insure the greatest success. Have your soil pH tested and make any necessary adjustments. Our office will test your soil pH for a fee of \$5.00 per sample, or some of the local garden centers will conduct the test free for their customers. The pH range for growing vegetables in sandy soil is from 5.8 to 6.5. The pH refers to the acidity or alkalinity (sourness or sweetness) of the soil and is an important factor in the production of quality vegetables. The following cool season crops can be planted from seed or small starter plants: beets, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, carrots, celery, kohlrabi, lettuce, onions, parsley, peas, radishes, spinach, collards, cauliflower, mustard, and turnips.

Night dampness brings out **snails and slugs**. Spread bait near tender plants, especially seedlings, and in moist, shady spots where creatures hide during the day. Read the label for instructions before using bait around vegetables and pets. An alternative to baits is diatomaceous earth. This powder contains tiny sharp projectiles that will puncture the snails and slugs. Sprinkle lightly around plants. This will not harm beneficial insects or pets.

Applying **water** before a frost or freeze is helpful to plants, but make sure your sprinkler system is NOT on automatic during freezing weather. A lot of damage can be done to

landscape plants when sprinklers come on in the early morning hours and ice forms on plants. The buildup of ice can cause limbs and plants to split or break.

Healthy plants can withstand **cold temperatures** much better than those neglected. Remember to water during dry spells. Mulch tender plants; this may prevent the stem and roots from being killed. January can be one of the coldest months in this area making it difficult to think about gardening. When there is a predicted frost, plants can be covered with sheets, blankets, newspapers, cardboard boxes or any other suitable materials. This covering should not be left on more than two or three days even if you have to re-cover them later. Should we get a light frost, hose the leaves of tender plants with water after the temperature raises above freezing, but before the sun hits the foliage.

What to do SHOULD we get a freeze? There is not much you can do to protect tropical plants in the landscape from being damaged or killed by a freeze. Covering only protects against frost. Some people erect an elaborate structure that is taller than the plant then cover it with plastic. Light bulbs are hung in an attempt to keep the area warm. Potted plants can be moved indoors, to a garage or shed for temporary protection. After potted plants are moved back out be sure to check the soil for dryness. The foliage could be transpiring (losing water vapor) on a sunny day after a freeze causing the soil in the container medium to become dry. Apply water to the soil as needed to provide available water for the plants.

While you may be tempted to prune damaged or wilted plants, severe pruning should be delayed until new growth appears in the spring. As you know, in this area pruning often encourages new growth, especially if we have a week of warm weather. This new growth is tender and subject to further damage from subsequent frosts or freezes. When it is time to prune, cold injured wood can be identified by scraping a small section of bark and examining the cambium layer beneath the bark. Dead wood will have a brown or black discoloration while healthy wood will be green. Prune damaged branches back to a green area. Herbaceous plants that tend to rot after a freeze can be cut back to try and save the root system. For more information on pruning, send a long, self-addressed, stamped (\$.39) envelope to **“Pruning Ornamental Trees & Shrubs”, 12520 Ulmerton Rd., Largo, FL 33774-3602.**

In what **zone** is Pinellas County? This is a question often asked by homeowners, especially during winter months when they are keeping track of temperatures. When selecting plant material, our zones are 9 and 10.

Many of you may have received a potted plant as a gift during the holidays and may wonder how to care for it. With proper care, a **poinsettia** plant used for the holidays can remain colorful and attractive throughout the winter. Keep your plant in a well-lit location but out of drafts. Water to keep the soil moist, but not soggy. Don't let your plant set in water. Once the colorful bracts fade and drop the plant can then be cut back and moved outdoors after danger of frost is past.

This is a great time for planting **bulbs**. Some bulb and bulb-type plants for this area are agapanthus, alstroemeria, amaryllis, caladiums, crinum lily, gloriosa lily, and zephyr lily. Work in a generous amount (twenty five pounds per one-hundred square feet) of organic matter such as compost, cow manure, sphagnum peat, or other types of peat moss. When possible, plant the bulbs in large masses for the best color display.

Roses should be pruned once each year during January or February in our area. This major yearly pruning consists of removing some healthy growth and all of the dead, injured, diseased, or unsightly branches. Leave at least half the length of each main cane that is one to three years old. The rose bush should bloom again in eight to nine weeks. Pruning cuts should be made just above an outward facing dormant bud, and cut surfaces larger than a lead pencil can be covered with white glue. When removing an entire branch, make a smooth cut at the trunk and paint with glue. Be sure to clean up clippings from around your plants after pruning to help prevent the spread of disease. Apply a layer of fresh mulch keeping it 2-3 inches away from the base of the plant.

Remove faded **camellia** flowers from your plants. Rake up any old blossoms that may have fallen to the ground. This helps prevent petal blight, which can become a serious problem.

Seeds from **papaya** can be started indoors this month. Clean the pulp off each seed and plant about ¼ inch deep in a container of potting soil. Fresh seeds usually germinate in ten to fifteen days but some may take longer. Under ideal growing conditions, fruit should be produced in eight to ten months. Seedlings planted in early March should produce edible fruit by November.

Florida has a wealth of **native trees** that are suitable for use in the average rural or urban home landscape. Native plants desirable for home use range from the spectacular southern magnolia to the yaupon holly that thrives in moist areas. They are adapted to climate and soil conditions of a given area and usually have fewer pest problems.

Remember that Florida's native wild plants are protected under the Plant Protection Law. Under this law, both preservation and propagation are encouraged. It is against the law to destroy, injure, harvest, collect, pick or remove any plants covered by the law without prior written permission from the landowner or legal occupant of the land. Another Florida law specifically protects sea oats and sea grapes. It is against the law to dig up or remove these plants whose growth helps prevent beach erosion.

Is Spanish Moss Helpful or Harmful? Although often accused of being a parasite, Spanish moss is really a native bromeliad epiphyte, receiving water and nutrients from the air, dust, and rain. The only obvious threat it poses to trees is by preventing air circulation through foliage, and limb breakage because of its weight when wet. Even this it will not kill a tree.

In years past, Spanish moss was used in filters, upholstery, and mattresses. The last moss processing gin in Florida was located in Gainesville. It burned to the ground in 1964 and was not rebuilt.

Some of the common **pantry pests** are flour beetles, saw-toothed grain beetles, cigarette beetles, drugstore beetles, rice weevils, grain moths, psocids, and grain mites. Large populations of these pests may develop in unused or undisturbed foods which were infested when purchased. Should you find any of these pests in your home, it is a good idea to check out cabinets and drawers where food is stored. When you locate the infested product and remove it from the shelf, the insects should then decline and finally

disappear. For a fact sheet, please send a long, self-addressed, stamped (\$.39) envelope to **“Pantry Pests”, 12520 Ulmerton Rd., Largo, FL 33774-3602.**

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Events at County Extension / Florida Botanical Gardens:

(UF-IFAS / Pinellas County Extension, 12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo 33774)

Through January 3, 2007...“Seasonal Sensations: an Illuminated Garden”

Stroll through the illuminated landscapes of the Florida Botanical Gardens nightly through January 3, 2007, 6 p.m. until 10 p.m. Pinellas County’s premier holiday light event with over 425,000 lights. Free of charge.

Jan. 4, 2007 at 6:30pm...“Africanized Bees - What Every Floridian Needs to Know”

Africanized Honey Bees are becoming established in the Tampa Bay area. Join Pam Brown at the Extension facility and learn to understand the behavior of these bees and how to protect yourself and your pets. Program free. Call (727)582-2673 to pre-register.

Jan. 6, 2007 at 10am...Family Fun Learning - "Earth's Most Wonderful Factory"

Come to Extension and learn why leaves are so important. Make a cool picture from nature’s gift, leaves. Free for all ages. Pre-registration required, call (727)582-2673.

Jan. 6, 2007 at 10:30am...“Florida-Friendly Landscaping” Location: Gulf Coast Museum of Art Auditorium Details:

Learn how to create and maintain a yard that is Florida-friendly and incorporates native plants into the design. Taught by educators from Extension’s Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program.

Jan. 13, 2007 at 10am...The Gardens and Daylilies of Tim Bell

Tim Bell is a daylily hybridizer in Sycamore, GA who also maintains an official AHS Display Garden. He will be showing slides of his garden and also his daylily hybrids. Daylilies for Florida will be auctioned at the end of the program. Call (727)582-2673 to pre-register.

Jan. 20, 2007 at 10am...Pruning Workshop

Attend this free workshop and learn when and how to prune your shrubs, palms, and trees. Call (727)582-2673 to register.

Jan. 22, 2007...Landscape Pest Control - the Florida-Friendly Way

Offered two times during the day: 10 to 11:30 a.m. and at 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.

Join Pam Brown to learn about pest control measures that help protect the Florida environment. Learn to identify beneficial insects as well as insects that damage plants. Call (727)582-2673 to pre-register.

Jan. 27, 2007 at 10am...Compost Happens

Think composting is a mystery? Join Extension educators for this informative program to discover how easy it is to create your own compost. Attendees receive a FREE 7.5 Cubic feet plastic compost bin (Pinellas County residents only). Phone (727)582-2673 for info or to register.

For more information:

www.pinellascounty.org/events or call (727) 582-2100