

## Things To Do in the Landscape

April 2007



**April** can be a hectic month in the yard and garden. Insects are busily munching on their favorite plants. Winter annual flowers are still blooming, but will soon need replacing. The grass, which was fertilized in February or early March, is growing lush, which means you will need to mow more often than you did in the winter.

**Bahiagrass** is one of the better drought tolerant grasses for this area and can be started from seed or sod. Seeds of either Argentine or Pensacola bahiagrass can be planted after mid-April. For best germination you would incorporate about two inches of organic matter into the top six inches of your soil. Use 10 pounds of **scarified** (have been treated in order to germinate more easily) seeds per 1000 square feet. The seeds should be covered by working into the soil with a rake. Ideally, top dressing with ¼ to ½ inches of soil would be the best method. Roll, if possible, to firm the soil around the seeds. Proper watering is the most critical step in establishing grass from seed. It is best to plant seed when rain is in the forecast. Seeding can be done until about mid-September. April is usually dry, so if you do put your seed down it is best to keep the soil moist by supplying water two or three times a day in small quantities. Keeping the seed moist is the trick to good germination. If the soil surface is allowed to dry out at any time after the seeds have begun to swell and before roots have developed, many of the seedlings will die. Improper watering is the most common cause of seed failure.

Keep a watchful eye out for **chinch bugs** in St. Augustinegrass. Straw colored grass along sidewalks, driveways or the street is usually the first sign of this pest. Chinch bugs are very small. In fact, when they first hatch you can hardly see them without the help of a magnifying glass. Young chinch bugs are red and hidden in the sheaths of the grass. As they mature and become adults they are still pretty small, about 1/5 inch long. Their color changes to black and white and they develop wings. Chinch bugs can kill large areas of St. Augustine lawns if allowed to feed freely. Chemical treatments of (1)Lambda Cyhalothrin, (1)Permethrin, (1)Cyfluthrin, (2)Imidacloprid, and (3)Neem oil may be effective if applied correctly according to label directions. If you need to treat the area again, be sure to use a product from a different chemical class to help avoid developing resistance to the pesticide. Products with the same number (1, 2 or 3) listed above are in the same chemical class. Be sure the product you use is labeled for chinch bugs, and follow the label carefully.

**Azaleas** should be pruned when they finish blooming. Even the small dwarf varieties benefit from pruning, which stimulates new growth, eliminates leggy growth and produces a denser plant. Azaleas are generally fertilized four times a year (February, May, August and November).

Those who missed the February fertilization can lightly fertilize now to accelerate new growth then give the regular fertilization in May. Use a special fertilizer for acid-loving plants.

**Citrus** trees that have finished blossoming should have their small fruit now. You may spray with neutral copper or Malathion to help prevent diseases and insects from destroying the young fruit. These chemicals are compatible and can be mixed for a combination spray providing you follow label directions carefully. Diseases such as scab and Melanose need to be prevented. Once they enter the leaf or fruit, it is a permanent blemish. Some fruit loss is caused by early disease infection. Rust mites and spider mites discolor the fruit and foliage causing some permanent damage. Aphids, white fly and scale are often troublesome, especially on new growth. Organic treatments of soap and oils will be effective if used properly. Natural enemies such as ladybugs, lace wings and friendly fungus also help keep insects under control. When you have large populations of these predators then it is best to avoid any type of chemical pest control. Even oils and soaps can kill beneficial insects.

**Oak leaf blister** is a disease we see nearly every spring. It develops during cool, wet weather becoming epidemic at times and infecting almost every leaf on the tree. While the blisters may be unsightly and cause excessive leaf fall, this disease seldom causes permanent damage.

**Powdery mildew** is a common disease that affects many plants. It develops more quickly when plants are wet for a long period of time or during warm humid days and cool nights. Powdery mildew requires moisture to become established. Gerbera daisies are one of the plants that can be severely damaged by powdery mildew. Drip irrigation is ideal for Gerbera beds because, if the leaves remain dry, and there is sufficient air movement, then mildew will not become a problem.

**Flower beds.** Winter annuals are still looking good, but soon will need replacing. It's not too early to start spring and summer annuals from seed. It is usually best to start seeds in a fresh, sterile, potting mixture. Some people have luck planting seeds directly in the flowerbed, but more often than not it doesn't work. It takes several weeks for seedlings to reach the flowering stage. By that time the winter annuals will have completed their life cycle and should be removed. Rejuvenate the bed by raking out all leftover plant material and adding 25 pounds of organic matter (peat moss, compost, animal manure, etc.) per 100 square feet (10 x 10 area). You can also incorporate fertilizer at this time. If you use slow release fertilizer it will supply nutrients over a long period of time. There are formulas that last for three or more months.

Fertilize your **amaryllis** plants with a low-nitrogen fertilizer such as 4-8-8 or other similar mixtures. Apply one pound per 100 square feet of bed. Amaryllis need to grow all spring and summer in order to form flowers for next year.

Plant **caladium tubers** now to add color to your summer landscape. Tubers should be planted two inches deep in loose, well-drained soil. Caladium's are grown for their colorful leaves and will give a splash of color in shade or partial sun. Several strap leafy varieties have been introduced that perform well in full sun.

**Roses** are growing and flourishing after their winter haircut. New leaves often-mean powdery mildew and blackspot. Fungicides are usually necessary to keep most roses in good shape. Weekly applications of Funginex, Basic Copper, or other labeled fungicides will help with disease control. Antique and English roses are more resistant to these diseases, as are the new knockout roses.

New growth on **hibiscus** should be well on the way by now. Plants that were injured by cold temperatures should be recovering quite nicely. There is still time to prune if you need to shape

your plants. Hibiscus, which blooms almost year-round, should be pruned periodically to control rank growth. They can be used as specimen plants or as a flowering hedge.

Continue to treat **vegetable plants** for disease control and check each day for insect injury. Daily monitoring of the garden will help you spot potential problems before they get out of hand. Mechanical removal of pests such as caterpillars and snails will help cut down on the use of pesticides. There are biological products such as *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) and insecticidal or disease control soaps available at local garden centers.

**Sweet potato** plants not only make a delicious edible vegetable, but also can act as an attractive ground cover. Sweet potatoes are a long season crop, so they need to be fertilized during the growing period. Use a 8-8-8 or similar fertilizer every five or six weeks.

Winter is over and most trees have renewed their **leaves**. Where the fallen leaves go is important. They make excellent mulch or compost, but when pine needles and leaves fall on roofs, they hold moisture, preventing the drying effect of the sun and may shorten the life of some roofing materials. Pine needles do not blow off the roof as readily as leaves. Both needles and leaves can clog gutters. It may be necessary to sweep leaves from the roof and clean gutters periodically. When used as a mulch, both broad leaves and pine needles keep flower beds from drying between watering and also add nutrients as they biodegrade. **So use the leaves for your benefit!**

Most people do not feel love for **lovebugs**. These insects usually swarm in late April and early May. The larval stage of the lovebug feed on leaf mold. This makes control difficult if not impossible. The adult fly has only one purpose, to find a mate. The lovebug does not sting or bite but they will mess up the windshield and grill of your car. The season lasts for six to eight weeks and yes, they do return in the fall. Avoiding lovebugs in not easy. They prefer the warmth of the day. If you are taking a trip across the state, plan to travel at night or early morning before they begin to stir.

**Magnolia trees** are called broad leaf evergreens but they have to shed their old leaves to make way for new ones. These old leaves turn pale green or yellow and drop. Magnolia trees shed throughout the year; however, major drops occur from April through July. Trees do not become entirely bare but many homeowners fear that the tree is dying. You may have to rake up many bushels of leaves each week if you have a large tree. All trees do not shed at the same time, so if your neighbor's tree looks better than yours, wait a few weeks. You will have new leaves and their tree will be shedding. Occasionally a magnesium or iron deficiency will cause yellow leaves but they have a distinctive pattern that can be identified easily.

#### **Upcoming Events at County Extension / Florida Botanical Gardens:**

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

**Tuesday, April 3, 2007 – Household Insects** by Horticulturist, Michael Pettay at the Pinellas County Extension, 12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo, FL 33774 in the Gardenia Room. Program will be presented twice- 10 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. Call 582-2673 to register.

**Saturday, April 14, 2007 – Florida-Friendly Landscaping with Native Plants at Brooker Creek Preserve from 10:00 a.m. until 11:30 a.m.** 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. To register call Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center at (727) 453-6800.

**Thursday, April 12, 2007- Brooker Creek Lawn & Garden Help Desk from 9:00a.m. until 4 p.m. at the Brooker Creek Environmental Education Center.**

Bring your gardening questions and plant problems to the Brooker Creek Environmental Education Center for diagnosis by one of our horticulturists. At 10:00 a.m. a program will be presented on Butterfly Gardening.

**Saturday, April 21, 2007 - Family EarthFest at the Pinewood Cultural Park from 10 a.m. until 4:00 p.m.**

At Florida Botanical Gardens, Pinellas County Extension, winding throughout Pinewood Cultural Park, this annual celebration combining Earth Day and Arbor Day features family friendly environmental and conservation activities, displays and vendors. Free admission and parking. Call (727) 582-2100 for information.

**For more information:**

[www.pinellascounty.org/events](http://www.pinellascounty.org/events) or call (727) 582-2100