



“Solutions for Your Life”

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Things To Do in the Landscape

December 2007



December is a month that turns our thinking to the holidays. So, it is easy to forget that cold weather may soon be just around the corner and we might not be prepared. Plan ahead on what **cold protection** measures you will take in case cold weather comes. Even trees and shrubs that are hardy in more temperate climates may put on new growth late in the season here and can be vulnerable to injury from early winter freezes.

Plants which may require protection in home landscapes are copperleaf, banana, papaya, poinsettia, hibiscus, ixora, dwarf schefflera, carissa, philodendron, croton, bougainvillea, allamanda, seagrape, bromeliads, tropical fruit trees and any other tropical or semi-tropical plant you may have planted.

Covers offer the most practical cold protection for prized plants. Old sheets, blanket, boxes, newspaper or plastic can be used for covers. When using plastic, build a frame over the plant so that the plastic does not touch the plant. Any covering material should be sealed to the ground. This will keep the interior three to four degrees warmer than the outside air. Apply the cover late in the afternoon, before the temperature starts to drop. Plastic covers should be removed the next morning after the temperature is above freezing but before the sun's rays become warm enough to cook your plants in its covering. Cloth or paper coverings can remain over plants for two or three days if temperature is expected to go below freezing each night. Additional information can be obtained by accessing the University of Florida/IFAS publication *Cold Protection of Ornamental Plants* on the Internet at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG025>.

Holly requires minimal pruning except to train the plants for special purposes, or to remove diseased or dead branches. If you do need to prune, this is a good time to do so since you can use the clippings as holiday decorations in your home.

There are many **gardening gifts** to give a gardener for the holidays. Here are a few suggestions for the ideal gift for a favorite relative or close friend. Pruning shears, watering cans, sprayers, fertilizer spreaders, hand tools, seedling starter kits, seeds, labels, flower arranging materials, gro-lights, potting soil and garden statuary. Gardening books also make great gifts – just be sure to look for Florida specific books like “Month-by-Month Gardening in Florida”, and “Florida’s Best Native Landscape Plants”.

Holiday plants

If your holiday **Poinsettia** comes in a container wrapped in a foil outer cover, be sure to remove it or punch holes in the bottom to allow for adequate drainage. Keep the soil around your poinsettia slightly moist, but not soggy and place the plant in a bright window out of direct sunlight. Poinsettias make excellent cut flowers. Once cut, they need to be treated to coagulate the milky sap and reduce wilting. Immerse the cut end of the stem in hot water for one minute and then place immediately in cold water. Cut the flowers at least eighteen to twenty-four hours before they are to be used and store in a cool place.

There are two types of flowering **holiday cactus**, the Christmas cactus and the Easter cactus. The Christmas cactus, *Zygocactus truncates*, usually flowers from Thanksgiving to Christmas and its leaves have pointed lobes. The Easter cactus, *Schlumbergera bridgessii*, has wider leaves, which are rounded. It usually flowers from Christmas to Easter. Allow soil to dry out between watering and keep the plant in bright light while in bloom. These are long-lived plants and can be kept outside in the shade during most of the year. They do need to be protected from frost and freezing temperatures.

Kalanchoe, pronounced (cal-ann-ko-ee), a winter bloomer has become popular as a holiday plant in the last few years. The thick, succulent leaves are of various shapes; the showy flowers are in terminal clusters and last for several weeks. Flower colors are yellow, pink, red, and various shades of orange. Since this is a succulent plant, let the soil dry out between watering.

Dwarf azaleas are usually available during the holiday season and make attractive gifts. These plants can also be planted around the home after the flowers fade. The small azaleas prefer shaded areas.

Winter and spring annuals are available at local garden centers. Pansies, calendulas, petunias, sweet alyssum, snapdragons and pinks are a few nice ones to use as bedding plants or in baskets and containers. All of these will survive frosts or freezes and keep on blooming. Others annuals that are a bit more sensitive to frost, but good to plant now are impatiens, geranium, and begonias.

Five or six weeks after transplanting, begin feeding with a light application of 5-8-8, 6-10-10 or other comparable slow release fertilizer every two months.

Gerbera daisy can be planted throughout the year but the best time is usually fall and early winter. Choose a well-drained area and amend with organic matter for nutrient and water retention. Roots may be slow to establish with the surrounding soil and plants may need daily watering. If you loosen the roots without breaking the soil ball, the plants will usually recover rapidly and become established more quickly. Gerbera crowns gradually sink into the soil after a period of time. The crown becomes entirely submerged after a year or two. Excess moisture at this time tends to encourage crown-rot organisms to infect the plant, gradually weakening and finally causing the death of your gerberas. Plants should be dug after two years and replanted to keep crown rot under control.

Transplanting **crape myrtle** can be done easily during the winter months. Large plants can be moved for an immediate effect in the landscape. One fascinating aspect of the crape myrtle is its unusual plant form. By selective pruning, the unusual, sculptured form can be enjoyed year 'round. As the tree ages, the smooth brown bark peels off in irregular shapes leaving an attractive mottled design.

Petal blight and bud blast are two problems when growing **camellias** in our area. Now is the time to stop these problems. Clear off old mulches and any debris under the plants. Spray plants with a fungicide labeled for use on camellias. Lay down a fresh supply of mulch being careful to only add about two inches. When flowers start to open, pick off any that look diseased. Don't allow old flowers to fall to the ground. Keep them picked as soon as they fade.

More and more homeowners are planting temperate fruit trees. **Peaches** are a favorite and several varieties produce fruit with limited amount of chilling hours. Floraprince, UF Gold, Flordaglo, and Tropic Beauty are varieties that should fruit in our area.

Peaches and nectarine trees should be sprayed now with a fungicide. You will need to repeat the spray in January. The University of Florida/IFAS publication, *Peaches and Nectarines for Florida* may be accessed on the Internet at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG244>.

Seagrape, the *Coccolobis uvifera* is not only salt tolerant but is a very versatile plant. You can use it as a hedge, espalier it, and grow it as a large shrub or as a 20 foot tree. Seagrapes have large, leathery leaves with red veins. These leaves are lovely used in holiday arrangements. You can also make jelly from the purple grape-like fruit.

This month is a good month for **pruning many deciduous plants**. Hardy plants such as oaks, elms, maples, sweetgum and other deciduous trees can be transplanted during the winter months. Grapevines, both bunch and muscadine, should be pruned while dormant. Bleeding of grapevines is not harmful if pruning is done when the vines are dormant.

Veggie Gardens

Remember to side dress **vegetable gardens** with fertilizer every three to four weeks. Use about one pound of 8-8-8 per 100 square feet. Apply along sides or between rows about six to eight inches away from the plant stems. Remember to water well after applying fertilizer. Try not to get fertilizer on the foliage as it may burn.

Tomatoes may be infested with late blight at this time of year. Symptoms include brown, water-soaked areas on the fruit and yellowing lower leaves that eventually turn brown. Late blight is a problem when there is high humidity and the temperature is between 60 to 70 degrees F. Control by using fungicides labeled for late blight. Apply according the label directions.

Texas Grano is an excellent **bulbing onion** to be planted here during the fall and winter gardening season. They require fertile, moist soil and take about 168 days to mature. The Texas Grano has pure white flesh, a mild flavor and sweet taste. It is also resistant to pink rot.

Cut down old **banana stalks** that have borne fruit. Mulch new plants with organic materials and water thoroughly.

Would you like to have fresh **herbs** from your own garden? This is an excellent time to plant several different types. Even if you don't have space, herbs can be grown in containers. Some even do well indoors on a sunny window sill. Some cool season herbs are sage, dill, cilantro, anise, sweet marjoram, thyme, lavender, rosemary, sweet fennel, and chives.

We often get calls about when **citrus fruit** are ripe. Citrus fruit **must** be fully ripe when harvested as the sweetening process stops once the fruit is picked. Many varieties of citrus have a long season in which they can be left on the tree and gathered for use as needed. There is a time however, when the tree stops caring for the fruit and it may dry out.

DO NOT prune citrus until after they bloom. The budwood has developed for blooms and new budwood will not form this late. Spray the trees with basic copper fungicide to help control fungus diseases.

Upcoming Events at County Extension / Florida Botanical Gardens

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

November 22 - January 3, 2008

every night 6 p.m. - 10 p.m.

“The Illuminated Garden”

Stroll through the Florida Botanical Gardens free brilliant display of more than 425,000 holiday lights each night through New Year's Day. Start a family

tradition of welcoming in the holiday season in style! For more information call (727) 582-2100.

Dec. 1, Dec. 8, Dec 15, Dec. 22, and Dec. 29

Market in the Park

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Pinellas County Extension and Florida Botanical Gardens
More than just a farmer's market, Market in the Park will bring together healthy, farm fresh local produce, delicious gourmet foods, beautiful plants and much, much more. County Extension experts and Master Gardener's will hold educational seminars on gardening, nutrition and cooking during market hours. Every Saturday, November 3 - April 19, 2008.

Dec. 8

"Woodland Creatures"

10 a.m. – 11 a.m. Pinellas County Extension and Florida Botanical Gardens
Cost: Free - Registration required. Call (727) 582-2673
Children and Families - Learn about the wonderful things that nature provides in the forest. Make a woodland creature.

For more events information:

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

Pinellas County Extension is part of a nationwide network of land grant universities providing unbiased, research-based information to America's citizens. In our state, Extension's land grant link is the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS). Pinellas County Extension serves as a bridge between the research labs of the university and the local community by providing educational opportunities for adults and youth.