

Things To Do in the Landscape

February 2007



Spring gardening will soon begin. It is not too early to till your garden area and incorporate organic matter. This should be done at least two weeks prior to planting. Add about 25 pounds of some type of organic material per 100 square feet of garden. Cow manure, compost, peat moss, or any combination of materials are suitable. Almost any type of vegetables are suitable for the spring garden so order those seeds soon, or check the local garden centers for their new spring shipment of vegetable seeds. Some nurseries have starter plants for tender crops now. Hardy vegetables such as cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, carrots, beets, collards, and onions are available.

Blossom-end rot is often a serious problem in the home vegetable garden. If you have had a past problem with the bottom ends of your tomatoes or squash turning soft and dark, then it could be a calcium deficiency. Correct this deficiency by using lime in the garden or treating existing plants with calcium chloride, commonly sold as Stop Blossom-End Rot. Fluctuating water can also contribute to blossom-end rot so be sure to water your garden properly.

Watch for the blooms on your **avocado** and **mango** trees. It is often a good idea to spray the blooms with a fungicide to keep disease from causing them to abort. Fertilize your trees using a 5-10-10, 4-6-6, or 4-6-8 mixture.

Thatch is an intermingled layer of dead and living shoots, stems and roots that develop between the green grass shoots and the soil that leaves the lawn feeling spongy. Thatch is seldom a problem in younger lawns, but can become a problem in older lawns, especially if they are over fertilized and over watered. Grass clippings do not cause thatch build-up when the lawn is properly mowed. The most common method of removing thatch is by using a heavy duty vertical mower. This specialized piece of equipment has evenly spaced, knife-like blades, which revolve perpendicularly to the turf. They slice into the thatch and lift it. This method, which can be used on St. Augustinegrass, Bermuda or Bahiagrass, removes both thatch and matting. Thatch removal allows water and fertilizer to reach the soil better. The best time to have the lawn verti-cut in our area is Mid-February through June. Rapid growth and quick recovery is important after thatch removal.

It is wise to hire a professional to do this job. The cutting is strenuous and there may be truckload or more of thatch to haul away.

Many **weeds** that grow in the lawn are annuals. They start from seed in the early spring, grow, flower, and re-seed all in one season. Summer weeds will sprout soon after night temperatures get above 70 degrees. Applying a pre-emergent herbicide in early February will help prevent these seeds from growing. There are many pre-emergent herbicides available and some are used only on a particular grass. Check with your local garden center to find the one labeled safe on your type of lawn. Some common pre-emergent herbicides are Balan, Betasan, Atrazine, Surflan, Treflan, and Corn Gluten. Always read and follow directions. Even a herbicide that says it can be used on your particular grass may still injure if the lawn is under stress or during hot weather conditions.

Reading the pesticide label is very important. It lists the pests to be controlled, how to apply and how much, precautions to take while handling and mixing the product. There are also instructions of what to do in case of accidents. Taking time to read the label may save the life of your plant or even your own. Just because you can buy something over the counter does not mean that it can be used indiscriminately. Using more than recommended is NOT better!

There is still time to **transplant** that tree or shrub that is in the wrong place. Most plants are in a dormant or slow growth mode at this time of year. It is not necessary to prune plants when moving. However, if you need to prune, then do so before transplanting. Plants will drop leaves that cannot be supported once transplanted.

When choosing and planting shrubs that will eventually become a **hedge or windbreak**, be sure to space them properly. When plants are small, the appearance might be that you have under-planted or that the plants are placed too far apart. Keep in mind that they will grow and fill in when planting distances are correct and they are properly cared for. Over-planting can be a serious and costly mistake. Know the plants you are putting in so that you will ultimately get the effect you want.

Now is the time to divide crowded **perennial** plants such as cannas, gerberas, daylilies, and stokesias. Division involves cutting large clumps into smaller sections, making sure that each smaller clump has an adequate supply of stems, leaves, roots, and buds to survive transplanting. Ferns, orchids, daylilies, bulbous plants, nandina, and liriope are commonly propagated by division. This is an excellent way to increase the area in the landscape covered with plants and decrease the amount of grass.

Each season dig plants from a portion or all of the groundcover area, divide the clumps and then replant them in a larger area. Some plants can be pulled apart, but many must be cut. Transplant the separated clumps at the same depth they were growing originally. Do not divide plants when they are flowering, but any other time during the growing season is suitable as long as adequate care is provided after planting.

All newly planted trees, shrubs, and vegetables should be **mulched** to conserve moisture and keep down weeds. A two to three-inch layer should be sufficient. Keep mulch at least two inches away from the trunk or stems of plants. Mulch may help prevent slugs from eating your strawberries. Consider using Pinellas County Recycled yard Waste

Mulch. Call the Pinellas County Recycling Hotline at 464-6001 for locations of free recycled yard waste mulch.

Rose pruning should be done during January or February in our area. Major yearly pruning consists of removing some healthy top growth as well as shortening main canes and lateral branches, removing small twigs and some of the oldest canes which improves the plants form. It also regulates height and produces better light and air circulation conditions within the plant. Leave at least half the length of each main cane that is one to three years old. The first flowers can be expected eight to nine weeks after pruning.

To avoid dieback and encourage rapid healing, pruning cuts should be made about ¼ inch above a dormant bud (eye) at a 45 degree angle. Sterilize pruning equipment before each cut by dipping in alcohol or a one part bleach and nine parts water mixture. When an entire branch is removed, make a smooth cut at the point of juncture.

Premature yellowing of old **palm fronds** is an indication of a magnesium deficiency. Epsom salts or magnesium sulfate can be applied at the rate of one-half pound per inch of trunk diameter, **NOT** to exceed five pounds per year. Apply as you would fertilizer and water thoroughly. You can make up a solution of one tablespoon per gallon of water to spray on the foliage and pour into the center of the bud, if possible.

Check **needle-type evergreens** often for spider mites and spray with a miticide when necessary. Mites are very difficult to control on fine-needled junipers, so several treatments at seven to ten day intervals may be necessary.

Prune **camellias** after flowering. Cut branches just above the point where last year's growth ends. Remove most of the new growth. Rake up any fallen blooms to help avoid petal blight next year.

Prune **hibiscus** the end of this month or early March. Hibiscus can be pruned throughout the summer to keep it from becoming leggy however you will sacrifice a certain amount of blooms whenever you prune.

The variety of plants that can be used in **hanging baskets** is practically endless. Although trailing plants are most often used, a plant does not have to drape to look great. Some of the narrow-leaved bromeliads make a spectacular display. Ferns are excellent hanging basket plants, especially some of the novelty type such as rabbit-foot where the creeping rhizome resembles a furry foot. Plants that produce runners such as spider plant, strawberry begonia or even true strawberries also do great in a hanging basket. For color, try some annuals such as petunias or ageratum or perennials such as vinca, begonias, Impatiens and geranium. Of course we can't forget the many different orchids with their wonderful flowers.

Azaleas not only add a splash of color to the late winter landscape but serve as an evergreen border or low hedge the rest of the year. Plant in partial shade. Purchase azalea plants while they are blooming. The planting hole for containerized or balled and burlapped azalea plants should be twelve inches wider than the root mass but not quite as deep as the root ball or soil surface in the container. Fill hole so that the azaleas are planted slightly above the depth they were in the container or nursery. An organic mulch applied to a depth of two to three inches will conserve water and reduce weed problems. Be sure to keep

mulch three inches away from the base of the plant. November to February is the best season for transplanting; however, containerized azaleas may be transplanted any time if proper care is provided. Plants should be spaced according to mature size of the cultivar but generally three to five feet apart.

Select **ornamental shrubs** such as hibiscus and camellias while they are in bloom. This will insure that you get the color you want. Many varieties are available at nurseries and garden centers in small, medium, or large containers.

For garden color almost year-round, plant **marigolds**. Marigolds are heat and drought tolerant and will bloom in about six weeks after sowing seeds, continuing to bloom until the first frost. During extended hot periods, they may stop blooming but will quickly start again once temperatures cool. To encourage flowering, keep faded blossoms removed. Fertilize every three to six weeks with a bloom boosting fertilizer.

Continue to plant **pansies** this month for color throughout the spring. Older plants can be pinched back to encourage new compact growth. Fertilize monthly.

Cacti will vary in size from tiny species less than an inch high to huge tree-like forms, 30 to 60 feet tall. Some grow upright; others spread out to form mats. Some have thorns or spines while others do not.

All cacti love plenty of light. They may be grown in flower pots, glass containers or in the landscape. Regardless of where they are grown, they should be planted in a well-drained soil. Gravel, coarse sand, or broken clay pots may be used for soil drainage in containers or for outdoor locations.

Some cacti are grown for their interesting forms; others for their flowers. The Old Man Cactus, Organ Pipe Cactus and Fishhook cactus are grown more for their odd appearance while the Holiday cacti and Night Blooming Cereus produce an abundance of flowers.

Cacti can be grown indoors provided there is enough light. The Holiday Cacti are often used as houseplants and coaxed into blooming by restricting the length of days from early October until mid-November.

Upcoming Events at County Extension / Florida Botanical Gardens:

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

Saturday, February 3, 2007 – “6th Annual Herb Fest”, 9:00am until 2:00pm.

The Pinellas County Extension, 12520 Ulmerton Rd., Largo. Demonstrations, programs, and sales. Call 727/582-2673 to request information.

Saturday, February 3, 2007 – “Family Fun Learning” , 10:00am until 11:00am.

The Pinellas County Extension and Florida Botanical Gardens, 12520 Ulmerton Rd., Largo. Take a tour of the herb garden and learn about useful plants. Make a tasty treat. Free for all ages, but pre-registration is required. Please call (727) 582-2673.

Saturday, February 17, 2007 – “Rain Barrel Workshop” 9:00am until

10:30am. Learn how to collect rain water from your roof. Set-up instructions and booklet included. One barrel per Pinellas County household will be provided FREE to the

first 125 to pre-register. Barrels provided by Pinellas Anclote River Basin Board of Southwest Florida Water Management District. Call (727) 582-2673 to pre-register.

Thursday, February 1, 8, and 15, 2007 – “Florida Style Gardening” 6:00pm until 8:00pm. at Boyd Hill Nature Park , St. Pete. The charge is \$2.00 per session. Seating for each session is limited to 50 and will be filled on a pre-registration basis. Please call (727) 893-7326 to register and for directions to the park. Class Schedule:

February 1 – Florida-Friendly Landscape Management

February 8 - Least Toxic Methods of Dealing with Landscape Pests

February 15 -Vegetable and Herb Gardening & Composting

Tuesday, February 20, 2007 - “Spring Lawn Care and Maintenance” – 10:00am until 11:30 am and repeated again at 6:30pm until 8:00pm. Get a jump start on the proper care and maintenance of your lawn using University of Florida research based on lawn care recommendations. Join Horticulturist Ken Jones for this informative free program. Call (727) 582-2673 to pre-register.

For more information:

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