

## *Things To Do in the Landscape*

**March 2007**



March is an excellent month to plant shrubs, trees, vines, and perennials. Both hardy and tropical plants can be installed this month.

Replace problem-prone plants with low maintenance native or non-native species. When planting from a container or transplanting from another location, it is best to plant at the same level or a bit higher than it was originally growing to allow for settlement. Wait about six weeks, then use the type of fertilizer formulated for your particular plant. Water every day the first week, every two days for the next four to six weeks, then once a week until the plant is established. Water should be adjusted for rain and soil types. Some plants may do better with less watering.

Once azaleas, poinsettias, and camellias finish flowering they should be pruned. Pruning encourages new growth and produces a more compact, bushier plant. There is still time to prune out dead growth and crossing limbs on crape myrtles. New growth begins in late spring. Flower clusters are produced on the new growth and pruning can encourage larger flower clusters, however, pruning is not necessary for the tree to flower. Prune lightly to maintain natural form.

Chrysanthemums make nice bedding plants but become leggy if not properly pruned. Small flowered varieties should be pinched when they are six to eight inches high. Unless these growing tips are pinched, plants may develop tall, weak stems that produce only a few flowers. After you pinch, new branches will develop along the stem. Pinch all shoots every two weeks until June 10<sup>th</sup> for early varieties, and July 1<sup>st</sup> for later varieties. Flowers will not form if you continue to pinch later than this.

**Christmas poinsettias** can be removed from their container and planted outdoors as soon as any danger of frost has passed. Dig your planting hole twelve inches wider than the root ball. Your poinsettia should fit in the hole at the same depth as it was in the container. Place the plant in the hole and fill around the ball with soil. Water every other day the first week then once or twice

a week thereafter or as needed to keep the soil moist but not soggy. Poinsettias have a tendency to get root rot when too wet or in poorly drained soils.

After the flowering period, **Christmas cactus** will produce new growth. Next year's flowers are formed on this new growth. To produce healthy flower-bearing tissue, fertilizer, and water should be applied at this time. Use a slow release fertilizer every other month. Water once or twice a week depending on the size and location of your plant.

Select your **caladium tubers** as soon as they are available at the garden center. Plant them in a shaded area or partial sun. Some newer varieties with strap like leaves can handle full sun locations. Space tubers twelve to eighteen inches apart in a prepared bed of organic material. Cover the tops with about two inches of soil. Firm the soil around tubers to prevent the formation of air between the tuber and the soil. Caladiums grow best in a moist, well-drained soil. Fertilize with one tablespoon of a fertilizer such as 12-4-8, or 6-6-6 around each plant. Fertilize monthly during the growing season. Caladiums may also be grown in containers indoors. Some cultivars which tolerate indoor conditions are Lord Derby, Fire Chief, Red Flash, Whorton, Porcile Anglais, Sea Gull, Beauty, and Aaron.

Heavy pruning of **hibiscus** is best done in the early spring (February or March). New growth should produce flowers in five to six weeks. Light maintenance pruning may be done any time of year to keep plants at desired heights.

One of the most common flowering trees in our area is the **weeping bottlebrush**, *Callistemon viminalis*. It produces bright red flowers that look like brushes used to clean bottles. The tree has a distinctly weeping habit and the leaves are narrow and willow-like. Its relatively small mature height of only 25 feet has been partly responsible for its wide popularity in landscapes.

Any discussion of spring flowering trees for our area must include the **jacaranda**, *Jacaranda mimosifolia*. This is the tree that the non-gardener may simply describe as "that purple tree". This native of Brazil and Argentina can grow to 45 feet tall. Its fernlike leaves drop for a period of time during the winter and usually the trees are leafless for the bloom period which occurs in April in most years. Flowers are sometimes also produced in the summer but usually not in the profusion of the spring bloom. A white-flowered jacaranda is known but it is not very commonly available. Jacaranda trees tend to be very brittle and may break in hurricane winds.

For the gardener who misses some of the spring-flowering trees and shrubs of northern areas, the **Chickasaw plum**, *Prunus angustifolia*, is worth considering. It produces a great profusion of tiny white flowers in late winter to early spring. It's small growing, often no more than 15 feet tall so it can be used in small yards. It does tend to sucker vigorously, forming shrubby colonies. It bears

small, acidic plums which can be used to make jelly. Flatwoods plum, *Prunus umbellata*, is quite similar but does not have the same suckering tendency.

Although it often does not come to mind when considering flowering trees, the **red maple** (*Acer rubrum*) is nonetheless one of our more colorful native trees. It does produce flowers but much of the color actually comes from the pink to reddish winged seeds or samaras. These seeds are as colorful as any flower. The downside of this display is that the seeds soon drop to the ground where they usually sprout in large numbers necessitating some hand pulling unless you want to live in a maple forest. Red maple does best where the soil remains moist most of the time and it is well suited to areas that may temporarily flood. Its deciduous leaves usually change to shades of red, yellow or orange before dropping in late fall or early winter.

Many different **bulbs** can be grown successfully in Florida. Amaryllis, canna, crinum, daylily, and spider lily are very common in our area. Some are true bulbs, others are rhizomes, tubers, and corms. We usually clump them all together as bulb plants. You may wish to try some different ones this year. Amazon lily (*Eucharis grandiflora*) can be planted from February through May and will bloom in late winter to early spring. They need partial shade and should be planted with the tip of bulb on the surface of the soil. Amazon lilies will grow in the ground, but in Florida they do best if grown in pots.

Things to **fertilize** this month are annuals, bahiagrass (if not fertilized in February), bananas, bromeliads, bulbs, cacti, crape myrtles, figs, hibiscus, hollies, ligustrum, papayas, and vegetables. Some people prefer to fertilize their lawns in March in order to use a weed-and-feed. Use care when applying an herbicide, even one mixed with fertilizer. Be sure the type of your grass is on the label and keep it away from the roots of shrubs and trees.

**Vegetable gardening** should be in full swing this month. Remember to keep a watch for insects and diseases and be prepared to treat at first sign of invasion. Vegetables are annual plants require a lot of fertilizer while growing. Keep side-dressing every five to six weeks. There is still time to plant pole beans, lima bean, cantaloupes, collards, okra, sweet potatoes, and summer squash.

Most **citrus trees** purchased for placing in the home landscape are grown in containers and can be planted any time of the year. The preferred time, however, is late winter or early spring. All grasses and weeds should be removed from an area four feet in diameter where the tree is to be planted. Thoroughly spade the planting area to a depth of two to three feet. Remove the tree from the container and, if pot-bound (tightly woven roots), make several vertical cuts in the root ball to stimulate formation of new roots. Set the tree in the ground slightly (1 to 2 inches) higher than it was in the container. Refill the hole around the plant with about 1/3 of the soil, then water to remove any air pockets. Allow the water to settle, fill the hole 2/3 full of soil and re-water. Finish filling the hole and firm the soil around the tree. Build a water basin around the

tree at least three inches high and thirty inches in diameter. Water three times a week for two weeks, and then drop off gradually to once every seven to ten days during periods of little or no rain. The young citrus tree will need some attention if it is to thrive and be productive. Water is very critical; too much water can damage the roots causing rot, too little water will cause wilting, which is very hard on a young tree. Citrus trees (especially young ones) should have about one inch of water every seven to ten days.

ALWAYS remove **suckers** below the bud or graft union on roses, gardenias, citrus, avocados, mangos, or any grafted plant. These shoots will grow fast and rob needed strength from the upper portion of the plant and will not produce the desired flowers or fruit.

Heavy infestations of **whitefly** may suddenly appear on citrus leaves. Check the underside of leaves for the pupae that looks like clear scale insects. Spray with malathion or parifin-based horticultural oil, being sure to get under the leaves. **DO NOT** spray if trees are in bloom.

Continue spraying **roses** weekly for black spot. If the leaves take on a dusty appearance or show signs of yellowing without black or brown spotting, check for spider mites. Mites are a common problem on roses in the dry spring months. Several products, including soaps and oils can be used to control mites.

Have you tried **bromeliads**? Do you want to change from the ordinary house plants? If so, you may want to try your luck with bromeliads. They adapt to conditions around the home, require little care and, therefore, make excellent house plants.

Pineapples are a familiar plant in the bromeliad family, a family native to the American tropics. Did you know that another common member of this family is Spanish moss.

Many bromeliads are air plants or epiphytes. In nature they grow on trees. They attach themselves by special roots but are not a parasite like mistletoe.

The nearly two thousand species of bromeliads provide plant lovers with an unbelievable selection of form, color, size, and blooming characteristics. They make wonderful additions to the landscape with some protection during a frost or freeze.

Normal temperatures found inside homes are also very acceptable for bromeliad culture. Homes with and without air conditioning are fine.

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

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

**Saturday, March 10, 2007 9am until 3pm – “Florida Yard Fandango”**

**Location: MOSI (Museum of Science & Industry) 4801 E. Fowler Av. Tampa, FL**

An exciting way to Grow Smart with Florida-friendly landscaping! Whether attending the classes of your choice or browsing the FREE Plant and Garden Expo, you'll learn how to create a beautiful yard that conserves water and protects the environment. Choose from 15 classes with your \$10 registration fee. For complete event details go to [www.floridayardfandango.com](http://www.floridayardfandango.com) Call (813) 300-5410 to register.

**Saturday, March 10, 2007 10am until 11:30am – “Compost Happens Workshop”**

**Location: Extension Service, 12520 Ulmerton Rd., Largo, FL 33774**

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

**Saturday, March 17, 2007 10am until 11am – Family Fun Learning - “Flowers in Your Shoes”**

**Location: Extension Service, 12520 Ulmerton Rd., Largo, FL 33774**

Learn how to add color to some unusual containers around your home...like old shoes, or use your imagination and bring something special to recycle as a flower pot. Free for all ages. Pre-register by calling (727)582-2673.

**Saturday, March 24, 2007 9am until 10:30am – “Rain Barrel Workshop”**

**Location: Extension Service. 12520 Ulmerton Rd., Largo, FL 33774**

Learn how to collect rain water from your roof. Set-up instructions and booklet included. Barrels will be available for attendees to purchase. Call (727)582-2673 to register.

**Saturday, March 24, 2007 10:30am until 11:45am – “Rain Barrel Painting Demonstration and Instruction”**

**Location: Extension Service, 12520 Ulmerton Rd., Largo, FL 33774**

Learn how to prepare your barrel for painting, select paint and materials, create designs, etc. Painting methods will be demonstrated. Call (727)582-2673 to register.

**Tuesday, March 27, 2007 10:00 am and again at 6:30 pm – “Snowbird Landscaping”**

Leaving Pinellas and heading up north for the summer? Looking for plants that will tolerate neglect? Take the frustration and mystery out of six-month landscape care. Join horticulturist Jean Field as she highlights plant selection, citrus, irrigation tips and maintenance issues relevant to absentee landscape care. This free class is repeated twice the same day. Please call 582-2673 to register.

**Saturday, March 31, 2007 10am until 2pm - Master Gardeners' “Spring Plant Sale”**

**Location: Extension Service, 12520 Ulmerton Rd., Largo, FL 33774**

A broad selection of plants including a variety of native Florida plants, herbs, butterfly-friendly plants, as well as shrubs, trees, and seeds. Sale opens to the general public at 9 a.m. (8 a.m. early opening for members of Florida Botanical Gardens only.) Memberships may be purchased in advance or on-site at the sale. Call (727)-582-2599 for more information.

**For more information:**

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