



“Solutions for Your Life”

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www.pinellascounty.org/extension

UF UNIVERSITY of
FLORIDA
IFAS Extension

Lawn & Garden | Commercial Horticulture | Families & Consumers | Florida Yards & Neighborhoods | 4-H Youth Development | Urban Wildlife

Things To Do in the Landscape

April 2008



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, incorporate about two inches of organic matter into the top six inches of your soil. You will need 10 pounds of **scarified** (have been treated in order to germinate more easily) seeds per 1000 square feet. Mixing the seeds with equal parts of builder's sand makes planting the seeds easier. Cover the seeds 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. A University of Florida/IFAS Extension publication on chinch bug management in St. Augustinegrass states that rapid growth resulting from frequent applications of water soluble nitrogen fertilizers may increase southern chinch bug survival, development time, and the number of eggs that can be laid rather than help plants outgrow any damage. Responsible use of slow-release nitrogen fertilizers may help reduce pest population build-up (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH036>).

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 fertilizer formulated for acid-loving plants.

Citrus trees that have finished blooming should have their small fruit about now. You may spray with neutral copper and 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. Organic treatments of soap and oils will also be effective if used properly. 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. 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 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.

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. Using slow release fertilizer will supply nutrients over a long period of time. There are formulas available 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.

Now is the time to plant **caladium tubers** 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 black spot. Fungicides are usually necessary to keep most roses in good shape. Weekly applications of Dithane-M45, Funginex, Basic Copper, or other labeled fungicides will help with disease control. The **Cornell formula** is a less toxic method of control. Add 1 tablespoon each of baking soda and oil (either a light horticultural oil or regular vegetable oil) to 1 gallon of water. If you use vegetable oil, add a bit of insecticidal soap (the amount recommended for mixing with 1 gallon of water). Shake well before *and during* application with a sprayer. Spray both sides of the leaves thoroughly every five to seven days at the first sign of disease. Antique and English roses are more resistant to these diseases.

Hibiscus plants should be flourishing with new growth 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 organic disease control products 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 an 8-8-8 or similar fertilizer every five or six weeks.

Winter is over and most trees are now completely leafed out. 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 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 May. The larval stage of the lovebug feeds 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 will certainly 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 is 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 their 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)

April 5 and continuing each Saturday until April 19, 2008

Market in the Park

8 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Location: UF/IFAS Pinellas County Extension and Florida Botanical Gardens

12520 Ulmerton Road

Largo, FL 33774

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.

Migratory Bird and Nature Tour

April 5, 2008

9 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Location: Florida Botanical Gardens Palm Pavilion

12520 Ulmerton Road

Largo, FL 33774

Cost: Free, but registration is required. Please call 582-2673.

Did you hear that jovial trill? What was that little yellow and brown warbler? Who just flitted up the tree trunk eating insects as it climbed? Come learn our migratory and resident birds while identifying them with nature's clues like sound, sight and their behaviors. Take advantage of this great opportunity to learn some of our visiting and resident birds! Adults and families welcome—no pets. Please wear closed-toed shoes. Binoculars and identification books recommended but not necessary.

Discovery Tour of the Florida Botanical Gardens

April 6, 2008

1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Location: UF/IFAS Pinellas County Extension Welcome Center

12520 Ulmerton Road

Largo, FL 33774

Cost: Free, but registration is required. Please call 727-582-2581

General guided tour of the Florida Botanical Gardens. We will discover native Florida plants and amazing exotics suitable for the Florida Friendly Landscape. Suitable for all ages and abilities. No pets, please.

Summer Gardens

April 9, 2008

Location: Crystal Beach Community Hall

517 Crystal Beach Av,

Crystal Beach, FL 34681

Cost: Free, but space is limited. Call Pinellas County Extension at (727) 582-2673 to reserve a seat in either session.

Get help with selecting plants that give landscape a colorful view during the summer by attending a free upcoming Summer Gardens Class sponsored by Pinellas County Extension Master Gardeners.

Twice on Wednesday, April 9, Pinellas County Master Gardener Denys Walk will share information on the many plants that can bring color to the garden during Florida's hottest months. The same class will be held twice with one at 2 p.m. and another at 6:30 p.m. Please note that the series will be held at the Crystal Beach Community Hall while Palm Harbor Library undergoes renovation.

The Summer Gardens Class is the fourth in the 2008 Garden Series. In April, join Walk to learn what can be added to the landscape to make it 'pop' in the summer. She will help gardeners meet their goal to have color in their yard all year long. This takes careful planning to ensure plants are included in the yard that will be shown at their best at different times of the year.

Participants may attend either the 2 p.m. or 6:30 p.m. session on April 9. Remember that both sessions will be held at the Crystal Beach Community Hall, 517 Crystal Beach Ave. located in Crystal Beach.

Africanized Bees in Florida and the Southeast

April 9, 2008

7 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Location: UF/IFAS Pinellas County Extension, Magnolia Room,

12520 Ulmerton Road

Largo, FL 33774

Cost: Free. Please call to register at 727-582-2673.

Maintaining your family's safety while enjoying the outdoors includes increasing awareness about the aggressive, Africanized bee. Join our guest bee expert to learn how this non-native bee differs from other important Florida pollinators. Understand where these bees came from, how they have impacted the European honeybee and the effect of their invasion on our own, docile, native pollinators. Also learn how to recognize a potentially Africanized colony, what to do, and the negative impacts of over-reacting to the presence of non-threatening insects. Sponsored by Pinellas County FMNP Chapter/Extension.

Compost Happens Workshop

April 12, 2008

10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Location: Brooker Creek Nature Environmental Education Center

3940 Keystone Road

Tarpon Springs, FL 34688

Cost: Free, but registration is required. Please call 727-453-6800.

Think composting is a mystery? Have you been confused about what can or cannot be added to the compost bin? Join UF/IFAS Pinellas County Extension educators for this informative program to discover how easy it is to create compost to use in your garden and landscape. Pinellas County residents attending will receive a FREE 17.6 cubic feet plastic compost bin after completing a short survey.

"Earthday Celebration"

April 19, 2008

8 a.m. – 1p.m.

Location: UF/IFAS Pinellas County Extension & Florida Botanical Gardens

12520 Ulmerton Road

Largo, FL 33774

Cost: Free

Come celebrate with us and learn about the wonderful earth that we live on. Have fun learning with exhibits, activities, and entertainment for the whole family.

Discovery Tour of the Florida Botanical Gardens

April 20, 2008

1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Location: UF/IFAS Pinellas County Extension Welcome Center

12520 Ulmerton Road

Largo, FL 33774

Cost: Free, but registration is required. Please call 727-582-2581

General guided tour of the Florida Botanical Gardens. We will discover native Florida plants and amazing exotics suitable for the Florida Friendly Landscape. Suitable for all ages and abilities. No pets, please.

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.

