



“Solutions for Your Life”

12520 Ulmerton Road
Largo, FL 33774-3602
(727) 582-2100

www.pinellascountyextension.org



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

Things To Do in the Landscape December 2008



December and the holidays are on our minds. 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 an early winter freeze.

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 or any other tropical or semi-tropical plant you may have planted.

Covers offer the most practical cold protection for prized plants. Old sheets, blankets, 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's foliage. Any covering material should be sealed to the ground. This will trap heat rising from the ground and 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. 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>.

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. If the recipient lives in Florida 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 truncatus*, 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.

In the Landscape

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 may become entirely submerged after a year or two. Once this happens, excess moisture can 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 shallowly replanted to keep crown rot under control.

Petal blight and bud blast are two problems when growing **camellias** in our area. Now is the time to combat these problems. Clear off old mulch 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. In addition, keep them picked off as soon as they fade.

Seagrape, *Coccolobis uvifera*, is a very salt tolerant and versatile plant. You can use it as a hedge, espalier it, 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 also. 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 carefully according the label directions.

Texas Grano is an excellent **bulbing onion** to be planted in our area 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.

Herbs

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.

Citrus

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)

Woodland Wreaths at Family Fun Learning Program

Saturday, December 6, 2008

Time: 10a.m. to 11 a.m.

Pinellas County Extension & Florida Botanical Gardens

12520 Ulmerton Road

Largo, FL 33774

Get ready for the holidays by bringing a little nature into your seasonal decorations. Learn about the wonderful things that nature provides in the forest and make a holiday wreath at this free *Woodland Wreaths Family Fun Learning* program. To learn more or register, please visit www.pinellascountyextension.org or call (727) 582-2673.

Pinellas County Market in the Park

Saturday, Dec. 6, 2008

Time: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Pinellas County Extension Parking Lot
12520 Ulmerton Road
Largo, FL 33774

Variety adds the spice of fun to the *Pinellas County Market in the Park* loaded with farm-fresh produce, natural products and gardening items. Adding a hands-on, educational dimension to this Market is a free *Woodland Wreaths Family Fun Learning Program* and a food demonstration. Entertainment and food make this Market great for the entire family. Free admission, on-site restrooms and plenty of room to roam make this Market convenient and accessible. It is located off 125th Street between Walsingham and Ulmerton roads, next to Heritage Village. The Market will be open through Saturday, April 18. For more information, call (727) 582-2100 or visit www.pinellascountyextension.org.

Pinellas County Market in the Park
Saturday, Dec. 13, 2008

Time: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Pinellas County Extension Parking Lot
12520 Ulmerton Road
Largo, FL 33774

The *Pinellas County Market in the Park* offers a rich harvest of farm-fresh produce, natural products and gardening items. This Saturday, Molten Mike headlines the entertainment with his special brand of genuine blues for anyone who enjoys steel guitar and real world blues lyrics. Dale Armstrong of Pinellas County Extension will share expertise about how to create thriving yards and landscapes in Pinellas County. Free admission, on-site restrooms and plenty of room to roam make this Market convenient and accessible. It is located off 125th Street between Walsingham and Ulmerton roads, next to Heritage Village. The Market will be open through Saturday, April 18. For more information, call (727) 582-2100 or visit www.pinellascountyextension.org.

Pinellas County Market in the Park
Saturday, Dec. 20, 2008

Time: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Pinellas County Extension Parking Lot
12520 Ulmerton Road
Largo, FL 33774

The *Pinellas County Market in the Park* offers everything from fresh produce and gardening items to dog treats and crafts to delight outdoor market lovers. This Saturday, entertainer Maria Chambers provides her own unique talents of bluesy, jazzy music with a folk blend. A food demonstration is also planned. Free admission, on-site restrooms and plenty of room to roam make this Market convenient and accessible. It is located off 125th Street between Walsingham and Ulmerton roads, next to Heritage Village. The Market will be open through Saturday, April 18. For more information, call (727) 582-2100 or visit www.pinellascountyextension.org.

Pinellas County Market in the Park
Saturday, Dec. 27, 2008

Time: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Pinellas County Extension Parking Lot
12520 Ulmerton Road
Largo, FL 33774

The *Pinellas County Market in the Park* unveils a bounty of farm-fresh produce, natural products and gardening items. This Saturday, entertainer Mike Meadows offers rock and roll favorites to keep the good times rolling. Free admission, on-site restrooms and plenty of room to roam make this Market convenient and accessible. It is located off 125th Street between Walsingham and Ulmerton roads, next to Heritage

Village. The Market will be open through Saturday, April 18. For more information, call (727) 582-2100 or visit www.pinellascountyextension.org.

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.