



**“Solutions for Your Life”**

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

## *Things To Do in the Landscape* April 2009



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. And, it is historically our driest month.

### **Landscape:**

**Bahiagrass** is one of the better drought tolerant grasses for this area and can survive our driest month easily. It may be a bit brown, but it does not die. Bahiagrass can be started from seed or sod, but it may be best to wait until the rainy season to plant or rejuvenate this type of lawn. Seeding can be done until about mid-September.

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 the insects can lay. Responsible use of slow-release nitrogen fertilizers may help reduce pest population build-up (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH036>).

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 bushier plant. Azaleas are generally fertilized four times a year (February, May, August and November). Those who missed the February

fertilization can fertilize now to accelerate new growth then skip the regular fertilization in May. Use a fertilizer formulated for acid-loving plants.

**Oak leaf blister** is a disease we see nearly 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.

**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. It takes four weeks or so before seedlings are ready to be planted in your garden. Rejuvenate the bed by raking out all leftover plant material and adding new organic matter. You can also incorporate a slow release fertilizer at this time.

Fertilize your **amaryllis** plants with a lower-nitrogen fertilizer such as 8-2-10 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.

It's time to plant **caladium tubers** to add color to your summer landscape. Tubers should be planted two inches deep in loose, well-drained soil. Caladiums 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 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. 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.

**Magnolia trees** are called broad leaf evergreens but they do shed their old leaves during spring. These old leaves turn pale green or yellow and drop. Trees do not become entirely bare. Occasionally a magnesium or iron deficiency will cause yellow leaves but they have a distinctive pattern that can be identified easily.

### **Vegetable Gardens**

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 during the summer growing season.

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. 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.

For additional lawn and garden information, visit the UF/IFAS Pinellas County Extension web site at <http://pinellascountyextension.org>.

**For events information / registration**

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

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