



“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 **June 2008**



As we go into June we are still in a serious drought. Many residents have expressed concerns about maintaining their landscape during drought conditions. Water restrictions are still in effect with most sources of water regulated to one day a week use for sprinkling the landscape. Reclaimed water is an exception but it is best to check with your municipality to get the specific water use schedule for your area.

With these water restrictions in force, it is very important that your automatic sprinkler system is working properly and that it is delivering $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch of water during each irrigation cycle. You can get the publication *How to Calibrate Your Sprinkler System* on the Internet at: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH026>, or call your local Extension office and request a copy.

Coping with Drought - Proper mowing practices are essential for maintaining turf in drought conditions. Every time a lawn is mowed, there is stress on the metabolism of the grass plant, which reduces root growth.

Use the highest setting on the mower for conditioning your grass, because a low cutting height will needlessly stress the grass. By increasing the grass leaf area, more photosynthesis can occur. This results in more carbohydrates for plant growth especially root growth.

The higher the grass is mowed, the deeper and more extensive the root system develops. Mowing should be done often enough to minimize the shock of cutting. Never remove more than one-third the height of the grass at any one time. If the grass is allowed to grow to four inches, do not mow it lower than three inches. Adjust the frequency of mowing to the growth of your grass. In the summer, it may be necessary to mow several times a week, but in the winter, once a month may be enough.

Keeping the mower blades sharp and properly balanced is also an important part of mowing practices. A leaf cut by a sharp blade will recover more quickly and lose less water than a leaf blade shredded by a dull mower blade.

Fertilization practices can enhance drought tolerance of turf grasses if properly done. Understanding plant responses to nitrogen and potassium fertilization is helpful in developing a beneficial program.

All of the drought conditioning accomplished by proper irrigation and mowing practices can be eliminated by excessive nitrogen fertilization. Shoot growth is enhanced and root growth reduced by excessive nitrogen. Leaf blades become lush and green as nitrogen fertilization increases. Lush leaves need more

water and are much more susceptible to insect infestation. A good lawn fertilizer will have 50% of the nitrogen in a slow release form. To green up the lawn during hot weather, use Iron sulfate instead of a fertilizer containing Nitrogen. The iron will green the lawn but not create the lush growth that needs additional water. Lawns should never be fertilized to deepen the green color, since southern turf grasses, except Bermuda is often more of a yellowish-green.

Potassium fertilization can help turf grasses increase their tolerance to stress. Potassium promotes increased root growth and thicker cell walls. Drought tolerance is improved by applying potassium. Turf grasses require potassium in nearly the same amount as nitrogen, especially in sandy soils where both can readily leach out. A fertilizer with a 15 – 0 – 15 analysis and at least 30%- 50% of the Nitrogen in a slow release form is a good choice to use.

Other macro and micronutrients, as well as the soil pH, should be kept at recommended levels for optimal growth. An occasional soil test is helpful in monitoring nutrient levels.

For more information you can access *Coping with Drought in the Landscape* at: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG026> or request a copy from your local Extension office.

The best time to seed Bahiagrass is after the summer rains begin. Bahiagrass seed is very large and requires five to ten pounds to cover 1,000 square feet. The lawn should be moist and level. The seed will need to be covered or raked into the soil to a depth of one quarter to one half inch. Keep moist until germination occurs which may be three weeks or more. If the soil is allowed to dry out any time after the seeds have started to swell, many of them will die.

Dingy brown moths flying around grassy areas are often an indication that eggs are being laid in your lawn by the **sod webworm**. These eggs will hatch into small green caterpillars in about five to seven days that primarily feed at night and remain in a curled position on or near the soil surface during the day. Injured grass has notches chewed along the sides of the blades. The foliage may be completely stripped in patches. A soap flush is a good way to detect sod webworms. Mix two tablespoons of dishwashing liquid in a gallon sprinkler can. Fill with water and drench a four square foot area. Observe the area for about two minutes. Soap is an irritant causing insects to surface. Pesticides labeled for sod webworm control are *Bacillus thuringiensis* (*Bt*, Dipel, Thuricide) and Carbaryl (Sevin). *Bt* is a bacterial product that will cause the caterpillars to stop feeding and die without harming beneficial insects (except butterfly caterpillars), wildlife, pets or humans. So, it is an environmentally friendly choice. Sod webworms may re-infest the lawn within one to three weeks after treatment. Continue to examine the lawn and re-apply pesticide as required.

Vacations and plants – When you plan to leave on vacation, it is important to get your landscape and potted plants in order prior to your departure. You can ask a friend or neighbor to check on your plants while you are gone. Place your outdoor potted plants in a shady location. Potted plants may be placed in the ground up to the rim of the container. A thick layer of mulch will conserve moisture and reduce the amount of water needed while on vacation. Place indoor plants in an area that receives indirect light. Direct sunlight will dry out the soil faster. Do not leave plants in a darkened room because leaves will drop. The last thing to do before leaving on your trip is to thoroughly soak the plants. Houseplants should be O.K. for two weeks. If your vacation is to be longer, then move houseplants outdoors and sink pots in a shaded and cool garden bed.

Prune **gardenias** as soon as they finish blooming if necessary to keep them in shape. Yellow leaves with green veins may indicate an iron deficiency. Correct by applying iron chelate or iron sulphate according to the label instructions.

Remember to keep old faded **crape myrtle** flowers clipped off to encourage more blooms, if you can reach them. Clip just behind the flower heads. When crape myrtles are allowed to produce seed flowering slowly declines as seeds are produced.

Powdery mildew is a problem with many of our ornamental and flowering plants. Roses, crape myrtles, gerbera daisies and zinnias are a few that are highly susceptible to this fungus. Plant leaves will have a white powdery appearance and heavily infected leaves often become curled and distorted. Flowers can also be damaged. Treatment should begin as soon as the damage first appears and continue at weekly intervals during warm humid weather. Banner, Propiconazole, bayleton, or triforine (funginex) are good mildew inhibitors. Try to avoid wetting foliage as much as possible and space susceptible plants for good air circulation, with good sun exposure or, plant resistant varieties. Micro-irrigation is a good choice for plants susceptible to powdery mildew.

This is the month when **chrysanthemums** can be planted. Pinch back to encourage branching that will result in more blooms in the fall. **DO NOT** pinch or prune after August. Use a low nitrogen fertilizer with a higher potassium number such as 6-4-10.

When **croton** leaves loose their color and appear blanched or faded, the cause is usually a thrips infestation. This sucking insect removes the juice from the leaves and plants often completely defoliate. Spray affected plants with insecticidal soap, Neem oil or a paraffin based horticultural oil.

A good plant for borders or beds is the **daylily**. There are three groups of daylilies – dormant, semi-evergreen, and evergreen. Dormant varieties do best in areas where there is cold weather during the winter months. Daylilies sold at local nurseries are usually of the evergreen type; however, when ordering from a catalog, be sure to purchase an evergreen variety. Evergreen varieties are best for our area. Dormant varieties rarely bloom after the first year in our climate.

Space plants twelve to eighteen inches apart and at the same depth they are growing in the pot. The soil should be amended with organic matter at planting. Clumps can be left in the soil for about five years before needing to be divided. Dividing and replanting will invigorate blooming. They bloom when grown in full sun to partial shade.

Leaf spots on **ligustrum** are usually caused by a fungal disease called *Cercospora*. Spray plants three times at ten day intervals, then once a month until spots stop appearing on new the growth. The old spotted leaves will not improve. Use a fungicide labeled for Ligustrum and carefully follow the label directions.

June is the last month to safely prune **azalea** bushes if you want flowers next spring. Fertilize your plants four times each year (February, May, August, and November) with fertilizer labeled for acid loving plants.

Vegetable gardening is winding down except for those veggies that like hot weather. Harvest all ripened vegetables often. Warm weather brings on many insects and diseases so check your plants often. Be sure to check number of days to harvest if using a pesticide. Many have a week or more waiting time and if your vegetables are almost ready to harvest, either be careful not to get the chemical on them or pick before spraying. Systemic pesticides are not suitable for vegetables since they not only get on the plant, but also inside of it.

As night temperature increase to 70 degrees and above, tomato production usually decreases. There are some container type tomatoes that will produce most of the summer. The varieties best suited for Florida are Florida Basket, Florida Petite, Florida lanai, Patio, Cherry, and Sweet 100's.

Many landscape plants prefer a slightly acid soil and will become **chlorotic** when the pH goes much above 7.0. Chlorosis is characterized by a yellowing of leaves. Many products are available to temporarily correct the problem. Iron sulfate can be applied at the rate of one-quarter to one-half pound per ten square feet. However, granular sulfur is more satisfactory. It acts quickly and is easier to incorporate into the soil. Use sulfur at the rate of one pound per one hundred square feet and DO NOT use more than two or three times per year. Wait at least two months between applications. Chelated iron compounds are also used to correct chlorosis. They can be applied to the foliage as well as the soil. Because the iron chelates are effective in relatively small amounts, an overdose may injure the plants. Always follow the label directions carefully.

Azaleas, pyracanthas, sycamores and other woody ornamentals may show signs of **lacebug** damage this month. Their feeding causes a gray, blanched, or stippled appearance on the upper surface of the leaves. Spray plants with paraffin based horticultural oil, fish oil, Neem oil, Malathion, or other approved pesticide. Follow the label carefully and be sure to spray the undersides as well as the tops of the leaves.

Upcoming Events at County Extension / Florida Botanical Gardens

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

Rain Barrel Workshop

June 7, 2008

9 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Location: Pinellas County Extension

12520 Ulmerton Rd.

Largo, FL 33774

Cost: FREE. Optional barrel purchase \$25 or \$50

Registration: (727) 582-2673

Pinellas County Extension Educators will teach you how to set up a recycled plastic barrel to collect rain water from your roof. Use the water for your potted plants, vegetable and herb gardens, special plant collections, etc. Workshop provides set-up instructions and a reference booklet is included. Barrels are available for attendees to purchase, for \$25 or \$50 each.

Rain Barrel Workshop

June 14, 2008 11:30am – 12:30 p.m.

Location: Sunken Gardens

1825 4th St. N.

St. Petersburg, FL 33704

Registration: (727) 551-3100

Educators from Pinellas County Extension will teach you how to set up a recycled plastic barrel to collect rain water from your roof. Use the water for your potted plants, vegetable and herb gardens, special plant collections, etc. Workshop provides set-up instructions and a reference booklet is included. Workshop fee includes a barrel with spigot.

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.