Urban Horticulturer

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TURF

Still not a lot to do with turf during the month of January. Mow as needed to keep the winter weeds from going to seed.

Weeds-We still do not have a good replacement for Asulox for post-emergence control of grasses particularly crabgrass. Winter weather kills the plants, but usually not before they have produced an ample amount of seed. The only option is to apply a pre-emergence herbicide, such as Halts, which will kill the germinating seed. This will need to be applied between the end of January and mid-February, when seeds start to germinate. I have heard unofficial reports that baking soda will kill adult plants. You may want to give this a try in small spots.

As with crabgrass control, the situation is still the same for control of basketgrass. This grass is also an annual, so it dies out during the winter months. It has a wide blade which appears to be wavy and it likes to grow in the shade under oak trees. However, it will move out into sunny areas and compete with St. Augustinegrass. I think this grass can be controlled with pre-emergence herbicides, but the timing of application probably is different than for crabgrass. I will be conducting a small test here at the Extension Office in which I will be applying pre-emergence herbicides at different times of the year for control of this weed. I will keep you updated on the results.

I still receive many calls from homeowners concerning the control of Bermudagrass in St. Augustine lawns. Controlling Bermudagrass in St. Augustinegrass and Bahiagrass is next to impossible. Bermudagrass roots grow many feet down into the ground. It is even difficult to kill bermudagrass with products like Roundup. There is a product called Progras, which is labeled as a Bermudagrass suppressant. Recommended time of application is spring and early summer. When you buy St. Augustine sod, make sure it is free of Bermudagrass. It is often brought into your landscape in infested sod.

COLD PROTECTION

So far this year the weather has been as predicted-wetter and cooler than usual, but not frigid cold. However, there is always the possibility that we will get that one night dipping into the low twenties, so you need to be prepared. Make sure you have enough sheets, freeze cloth, blankets, etc. to cover all the plants that you want to protect.

When a hard freeze is predicted, water your plants the morning before the predicted freeze. However, you don't want your plants to be wet going into the evening hours. The reason for watering is that the moisture in wet soil holds more heat than dry soil.

Cover the plants so that the material goes all the way to the ground. The idea is to trap enough heat under the cover to protect the plant from the cold during the night. Place

weights on the material on the ground so that it doesn't blow. To further retain the heat, the sheet, freeze cloth etc. can be covered with plastic, however never cover plants with just plastic as plant parts may be frozen where they are in direct contact with the plastic. The effectiveness of covering plants depends to some extent on the wind. During freezes with windy weather, the covers tend to be less effective, because the wind blows the heat away. During windy freezes, the addition of plastic sheeting over the cloth covering may be worth the effort on valuable plants. A light bulb may also be placed under the cover to give additional heat.

We don't recommend that you use water to protect your landscape from cold weather. It is true that as water freezes heat is released, thus a coating of ice will keep plants at a temperature of about 33 degrees F. The problem occurs when the water is not applied at a fast enough rate to prevent super-cooling, which results from high winds and low temperatures. A light, but constant flow of water will protect plants, but residential sprinkler systems usually do not have the output capacity needed to protect tender plants. As a result, cold damage to the plants will be more severe than if nothing at all had been done. Also, running your sprinkler system all night wastes a tremendous amount of water and could get pretty expensive.

INDOOR PLANTS

Most of us enjoy having green plants in out homes. Not only do they add a special feeling to the room, they clean the air. Often, however, these once attractive plants soon become pathetic looking with droopy yellow leaves. When plants are placed in homes, they are confronted with adverse growing conditions such as low light and dry air.

All plants must have light, however they differ greatly in the amount of light they need. Plants with highly colored leaves, flowering plants, and succulents grow best when placed in an area where they receive full light. Others like ferns, philodendrons and many other foliage plants grow well in indirect light. Ten widely used house plants are: Pewter plant (Alglaonema), cast iron plant (Aspidistra elatior), Dracaena, Parlor palm (Chamaedorea), pothos (Epipremnum aurem), heart leaf philodendron, Mother-in-law tongue (Sansevieria spp.) and peace lily (Spathiphyllum).

Plants grown in pots in homes are often over watered, while a few are under watered. The most accurate gauge to follow is to water when the potting soil becomes dry to the touch. Stick your finger into the mix up to the first joint. If it is dry at the tip, then you need to water. Apply enough water until it runs out of the bottom of the pot. This type of watering will flush salts out of the pot, and it guarantees that the bottom two third of the pot is properly watered. Do not allow water to stand in the saucer as it keeps the soil in the bottom of the pot too wet.

Interior plants under active growing conditions should be fertilized every two to three months. During winter months, or under conditions of low light, the frequency of fertilization should be reduced. Many problems associated with growing plants indoors are erroneously attributed to insufficient fertilizer. Poor growth is usually due to some other factor, such as insufficient light.

Plants grown in the home collect dust just as furniture and will require periodic cleaning and grooming. Clean plant foliage by washing with warm water. Some plant leaves are difficult to clean and may require the addition of a drop or two of detergent to the cleaning water. Rinse washed leaves with clear water to remove the soap film. Keep

plants attractive by removing yellow leaves and faded blooms.

TERMITES

This is the month when you may begin to see evidence of termites in or around your home. People often have trouble distinguishing termites from ants. There are however, distinct differences between termites and ants. Termites have two sets of equal size wings, beaded antennae and the abdomen is broadly joined to the thorax. Ants have elbowed antennae, two sets of different size wings and the connection between the abdomen and thorax is constructed.

There are two types of termites that you have to be concerned about. The dry wood termite and the subterranean termite. At this time of the year, you probably will most likely see subterranean winged adults. The winged males and females have mating flights after which the females drop their wings and look for a place to nest in moist soil. They must have moisture or they will die. Subterranean termites are treated with soil insecticides such as Termidor or bait systems such as Sentricon. Both systems are usually effective.

Drywood termites will infest dry wood as the name implies and are not associated with soil. The treatment for drywood termites (tenting) is different from subterranean termites (soil treatment) so identifying what you have is extremely important. An excellent way to identify drywood termites is by the fecal pellets that they push from their galleries. The adults can only be distinguished from their wing venation. I suggest that you bring any specimens that you are unsure about to the Extension Office for me to look at. If they turn out to be termites, then, call 2-3 well known pest control company out to you house for an inspection. The inspections are usually free. Make sure that the company you hire to do the treatment will fix any termite structural damage that may occur after their treatment.

MISC. JANUARY GARDENING

Fruit trees-Make the first application of fertilizer to citrus that is older than five years. The rule of thumb is to apply 1 pound 6-6-6 or 8-8-8 per year of age up until 8 years old. The fertilizer should be applied evenly under the drip-line of the tree starting 6-8 inches out away from the trunk. Now is also a good time to fertilize deciduous fruit trees, such as, pecans, apples, peaches, nectarines, pears, etc.

Arbor Day-Arbor day in Florida this year is January 17. In Florida it is always the third Friday in January This is an excellent time of year to put a new tree in your landscape.

Transplanting-January is a good month to transplant trees and shrubs. Take a fairly large root- ball. The rule of thumb for trees is to have 12-15 inches of root ball for every inch of trunk.

Vegetables to be planted-Asparagus, beets, broccoli, Brussel's sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, collards, endive, horseradish, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, onion sets, peas, potatoes, radicchio, roquette, rutabagas, spinach, Swiss chard and turnip.

Flowers to be planted-Alyssum, arctosis, aster, begonia, blanket flower (Gaillardia), calendula, candytuft, Dianthus, Forget-me-not, daisies (Gloriosa, Shasta, etc.), marigolds, nasturtium, pansy, petunia, phlox, sweet pea and verbena.

Herbs to be planted-Anise, bay laurel, cardamom, fennel, garlic, ginger, lavender, mint, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, sweet

marjoram, thyme and watercress.

Roses-January is the recommended time of the year to prune roses.

Perennials-Any of the bulbs or perennials commonly grown in Florida can be planted in January, such as agapanthus, amaryllis, Aztec lily, calla lily, crinum lily, gladiolus, lycoris, clivia, walking iris, morea, narcissus, spider lily, tritonia, tuberose, watsonia, and zephyr lily.

Other perennials include blackberry lily, blue sage, butterfly weed, cardinals guard, coreopsis, daisy bush, daylily, false dragon head, four-o'clock, gaillardia, gerbera daisy, liatrus, Stokes aster and yarrow.

Crape myrtle pruning-Crape myrtles can be pruned anytime after all the leaves have fallen. Generally crape myrtles need very little pruning. Remove small spindly stems starting to grow from the base, thin to 3,5, or 7 main trunks, remove last season's seed pods and make all pruning cuts back to a point along the stem up to one inch in diameter.

WATER HARVESTING
By Anne Macloskey-FYN

With the onset of all of the recent rains, it is a perfect time to talk about collecting rainwater. The creation of a rain barrel to harvest water is a great way to save water in and around your home. The savings can be substantial over a period of time, so now is a great time to get started!

Harvested water can be used to water your plants, wash your garden tools and wash you car. Rain barrel water is much more beneficial to plants than potable water. The additional minerals help keep your plants healthy and green.

There are many different ways to create a water harvesting system. You may obtain free information on making a rain barrel at the Polk County Extension Service.

The Florida Yards and Neighborhoods program will be offering Rain Barrel Workshops throughout the year. Call (863)519-8677 x 121 to sign up for this informative workshop. The cost is $10 and includes a rain barrel.

Have a good gardening day,

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