

# POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER

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## WEB PAGE

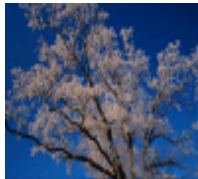
Dear reader, I'm happy to inform you that you can now find the Urban Horticulturer on our new Polk County Horticultural Internet Web Site-<http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu>. In addition to each new monthly newsletter, you will have access to old issues back through 2001. I'm sorry some of the old copies were lost for various reasons over the past 2 ½ years, but most are available for your perusal.

They are available in pdf files, so all you need is Acrobat Reader software to download the files. If you don't have Acrobat Reader software currently on your computer, it can be downloaded from the Internet free of charge.

## SPRING FLOWERING TREES

As we drive through Polk County and central Florida in general, we are having the pleasure of viewing many spring flowering trees such as the trumpet trees (*Tabebuia*), orchid trees, red bud trees, and dogwood trees. Also flowering are fruit trees such as citrus, peach and plums. The edible hog plum or flatwoods plum is often seen in undisturbed sites.

**Trumpet trees** - This tree is more commonly known by its scientific name-*Tabebuia*. There are more than 200 species of *Tabebuia* in the world having flowers of various colors especially yellow and pink. The trees are usually deciduous (drop their leaves in winter) or semi-deciduous. The color we see most often in Polk County is the



species with the beautiful yellow flowers-*T. chrysotricha*. For the last 2-3 weeks golden trumpet trees have been in full bloom all over this area. If you drive along Hardin Blvd. by Lake Hunter, you will see many trees with either yellow or pink foliage planted in the median. The trees with the pink and purple flowers are different species of trumpet trees- *T. heptaphylla* (pink flowers) and *T. impetiginosa* (purple flowers).

The tree can be used as a specimen tree, patio tree or street tree. It can be propagated by air layering, grafting and seed. It is very easy to germinate seed and start new plants. It does best in full sun to partial shade and grows to a height of about 25 feet. Once established, it can survive on rainfall alone and produce an excellent flower display each year.

The tree is considered to be cold sensitive (recommended for zones 9b through 11) and can be damaged by frosts and freezes. As I have mentioned before, there are microclimates within Polk County (zone 9a), such as around lakes and other protected areas in which *Tabebuia* will grow and do well. However, it is wise to keep in mind that freezes will damage these trees and can cause poor growth. When this happens, the wood may become brittle with age and can break in strong winds. In spite of its cold sensitivity, I still recommend placing this beautiful flowering tree in our landscape.

**Redbud tree** - Another common flowering tree in Polk County is the redbud-*Cercis canadensis*. The redbud is a deciduous tree with heart shaped, 3-6 inch long leaves and

can reach heights of about 35 feet. The blooms are rose pink and about ½ inch long. The tree blooms in January and February before spring leaves appear.

In central Florida, redbud trees probably do better in areas that do not receive full sun. Best growth occurs in a light, rich, moist soil, but they can do quite well in a variety of soils including sandy and alkaline. Trees will do better when given some irrigation during hot dry spells in April-May and October-September. Young trees are easiest to transplant and survive best when planted in the spring or fall.

Redbuds are best propagated by seed. Use ripe seed to plant directly, or if the seed has been stored, scarification is necessary before planting. Cultivars can be propagated by grafting onto seedlings, or by summer cuttings under mist or in a greenhouse.

There are a few pests associated with redbuds. Borers attack the trunks of older trees, so you need to keep the plant as healthy as possible. The trees sometimes have scales which can be controlled with horticultural oils. In addition, webworms can defoliate parts of trees in the summer and fall.

**Orchid tree** - This is a deciduous to semi-evergreen tree with a vase-shaped open canopy now in bloom. The leaves are wider than long and split by two lobes. Sometimes, there are two separate leaflets depending on the species. The orchid like blooms, in shades of purple, red, pink, white, or yellow with 5 petals, are 3-4 inches across and produced in abundance at various times of the year, depending on the species. The one blooming at the present time in Polk County has purple flowers and is probably *Bauhinia variegata*. The flowers are followed by many brown, woody, 12 inch long seed pods which are unattractive and can be a nuisance.

These trees grow best in full sun or high shifting pine shade in any well drained soil, but in alkaline soil the trees will show yellowing of the leaves. Propagation is by seeds and cuttings. Chewing insects and borers may present a problem for orchid trees, but no diseases are a major concern.

## LANDSCAPE PLANNING

By Anne Yasalonis, FYN Program  
Coordinator

Putting the right plant in the right place is often the most overlooked, yet the most important landscape design concept. By simply choosing the best plant material for your site, you can avoid costly mistakes. There are many things to keep in mind before you dig your first hole. Plant selection is then determined by individual site characteristics.

First, contact the Extension Service to obtain a complete soil analysis prior to planting. The conditions of your yard will greatly affect the survival of your chosen plant material. Also, think of how you will use certain areas of your yard. Will children or pets be using the area? This will make a big difference in the plant material you choose.



The plants you select should also be able to survive and thrive on rainfall or very minimal watering. They should also be grouped by their water needs and irrigated accordingly. When you are ready to start choosing the plants for your site, make sure you know as much as you can about the plant. The mature size is often underestimated, especially in Florida. You want to spend as little time pruning and reworking overcrowded landscapes as possible.

Check out <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for plant recommendations for your site or contact the extension service for plant lists for Central Florida. Contact Anne Yasalonis for more information on the *Landscape Design Basics* workshop that will be held throughout the year at the Polk County Extension office (863) 519-8677 Ext. 121.

## PRUNING

Now is the time to trim freeze damaged wood from sensitive trees and shrubs. If you don't have green leaves emerging from the stems, then I suggest making a little nick along the stem until you find green wood. Then, make the pruning cut below the dead area. Sometimes, the whole stem will appear to be dead, but that doesn't mean the plant is actually dead. Often, in cold spots, like at my home, crotons, tibouchina and hibiscus will be killed to the ground by freezing temperatures, but the roots are often still alive. Give these plants another 2-3 months before you dig them up.

Now is also the time to prune those plants that are a little out of control. Generally, when

landscape shrubs and trees have been planted in the proper location and have not been over fertilized, they don't require a lot of pruning. If you do need to prune, then I suggest that you use pruning techniques which give the plant a natural look rather than the formal hedge look. The first step in pruning a shrub is to remove all dead, diseased or injured branches. Remove branches that cross and touch each other and those that look out of place. If the shrub is too dense or large, remove some of the oldest branches. Cut back excessively long branches to a lateral branch or bud that is 6-12 inches below the desired plant height.



Thinning also may be desirable. Do not use hedge shears. Cut each branch separately to different lengths with hand pruners. This will maintain a neat informal shrub with a natural shape. Plants sheared into hard geometric shapes with hedge trimmers look out of place in a landscape designed to look natural.

Remember that plants producing flowers on the current season's growth should be pruned now such as allamanda, abelia, citrus, crape myrtle, croton, fig, golden dewdrop, grape, hibiscus, juniper, ligustrum, mandevilla, maple, oaks, oleander, plumbago, poinsettia, rose, sweet gum, sycamore, thryallis, tibouchina and viburnum.

You should wait to prune winter and spring flowering plants until after flowering, but before flower buds form for next years bloom such as azaleas, banana shrub, bottle brush, bougainvillea, bridal wreath spirea, camellia, chaste trees, climbing roses, coral honeysuckle, dogwood, gardenia, some hydrangea, Indian hawthorn, Jerusalem-thorn, loropetalum, star and saucer magnolia, orchid tree, peach tree, pear tree, redbud and wisteria.

## MISC. MARCH GARDENING

**Herbs to plant** - anise, basil, bay laurel, borage, cardamon, chives, coriander, costmary, dill, fennel, ginger, lemon balm, sweet marjoram, Mexican tarragon, mint, oregano, rosemary, sage, thyme and watercress.

**Flowers to plant** - African daisy, ageratum, alyssum, balsam, begonia, black-eyed Susan, blue daze, bush-daisy, celosia, cleome, coreopsis, cosmos, dahlia, dahlberg daisy, dusty miller, four o'clock, gaillardia, geranium, goldenrod, impatiens, Joseph's

coat, licorice plant, marigold, melampodium, million bells, moon vine, morning glory, nierembergia, salvia, strawflower, torenia, verbena, vinca, zinnia.

**Vegetables to plant** - bean, beets, calabaza, cantaloupe, carrots, cassava, chayote, collards, corn, cucumbers, dasheen, eggplant, Jerusalem artichoke, jicama, luffa, malanga, New Zealand spinach, okra, pepper, pumpkin, radish, southern pea, summer and winter squash, sweet potato, tomato, turnips and watermelon.

**Fertilizing shrubs** - Now is a good time to fertilize your landscape shrubs. The usual recommendation is to fertilize shrubs 2-3 times per year-once in the spring and once in the fall with one application during the summer, if needed. If your established shrubs are doing well and don't look deficient, then it may not be necessary to fertilize them at all. Excess fertilizer will promote growth that you will have to eventually prune. And, any fertilizer that isn't taken up by the plants may end up in the local lake.

If you do fertilize, use a fertilizer that has 30-50% slow release nitrogen. Look on the label under nitrogen for the kinds of available nitrogen in the bag. You will see terms such as **nitrate nitrogen** (easily leaches from soil), **ammoniacal nitrogen** (is converted to nitrate nitrogen by bacteria and leaches readily-is somewhat acid) and **urea nitrogen**, which readily changes to ammoniacal nitrogen and leaches quickly. You should see a line for **water insoluble nitrogen**.

To slow down the transformation of urea nitrogen to ammoniacal nitrogen, fertilizer producers often coat urea with sulfur. So, under water insoluble nitrogen or slow release nitrogen, you will see a percentage of sulfur coated urea-this is your **slow release nitrogen**. Sewage sludge is also included in some shrub fertilizers as slow release nitrogen. And, of course there are the poly coated slow release nitrogen such as in Osmocote products.

Lesco has a 12-2-14 landscape fertilizer with 4.25% of the 12% nitrogen in a slow release form-sulfur coated urea (which calculates out to 35% slow release nitrogen), 4.25% slow release potassium, 4.5% iron and 2.5% magnesium. There are also 6-6-6 and 8-8-8 fertilizers that have sewage sludge as slow release nitrogen sources that are locally available. In a 6-6-6 fertilizer, 2% or more of the 6% or 8% nitrogen should be in a water insoluble form. Look at the label.

Have a good gardening day,

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