

POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

July 2003

SUMMER PROGRAMS

We are offering a series of four Saturday programs (9:00 a.m. until noon) for homeowners during the months of July and August. They will be held at the Extension Office in Bartow. All programs are free and open to the general public. Feel free to attend one or all of the programs. The schedule is as follows: July 12 - Home Lawn Maintenance, July 19 - Care of Dooryard Citrus, July 26 - Establishment and Maintenance of Florida Shrubs and August 2 - Insects In and Around the Home. Sorry this is coming to you a little late. Hope to see you there!

TURF

Sod Webworm - I am beginning to see sod webworm damage in St. Augustinegrass. This pest is a small tan to gray moth with a wingspan about 3/4 to 1 inch. The adult moth is active at night laying eggs. They rest in the daytime and will fly up in clouds when disturbed.



The larvae are about 3/4 inch long and cause damage to grass by eating the leaf blades. You can often see the webs they make on the blades of grass in the morning dew. However, don't confuse sod webworm webs with spider webs. The larvae feed at night while spending

the daylight hours curled up in a ball on the surface of the soil. The damage, when severe, looks like a lawnmower has scalped a circular area. Treat with a biological insecticide such as Thuricide or a synthetic insecticide such as Talstar (bifenthrin).

Chinch bugs - Keep an eye open for chinch bugs in your St. Augustinegrass. These insects are still around and can kill patches of your turf. Check suspicious areas that are hot and dry such as along drive-ways and sidewalks. A good way to check for chinch bugs is with a soap flush (2 tablespoons liquid detergent in a 2 gallon watering can) poured onto a 2x2 foot area. Wait for a few minutes for the chinch bugs to come to the surface.

Mole crickets - Be watching for mole crickets in Bahiagrass. Mole crickets loosen the soil as they tunnel about looking for food. This tunneling can lead to the death of the turf. Treat with a low toxicity bait or a chemical insecticide such as Talstar (bifenthrin).

White Grubs - These insects can also be a problem for turfgrass. Most white grubs feed on the roots of turfgrasses. I receive many calls from homeowners concerning holes in their lawn about the size of a quarter with a pile of dirt beside the hole. This hole is made by the rhinoceros or ox beetle after completing its larval (white grub) stage. In addition, there are several other white grubs that feed on the roots of turfgrasses. The

adults are scarab beetles that emerge from the ground and feed on your landscape plants at night.

If your bahiagrass or St. Augustinegrass is yellowing and iron treatments and/or slow release nitrogen don't seem to correct the problem, then white grubs may be the problem. You can check for white grubs by cutting a piece of sod (6 inches square) on 3 sides and under the root mass. Gently turn the piece up and check for white grubs under the root mass. After checking for white grubs, lay the sod piece back in place. If you find several white grubs, then you may want to consider a chemical insecticide treatment with a product such as Bayer Advanced White Grub Control with imidacloprid or other current products with white grub control in turf on the label.

Weed Control - In past newsletters, I have discussed using baking soda or a product called AgraLawn (with baking soda and cinnamon) for control of some weed species in both St. Augustinegrass and Bahiagrass. The results of the small tests that I have done indicate crabgrass, basketgrass and Florida pusley were killed back extensively with the AgraLawn product. However, the basketgrass did seem to recover to some extent. Most of the Florida pusley and crabgrass seemed to be killed. The problem with the AgraLawn product is that if you have a severe infestation of any of the above weeds, the cost of using this product would be excessive. I'm going to do a few comparison tests with just baking soda which is a lot less expensive.



Diseases - With all the rain we have had in June, some homeowners are having disease problems in their lawn. When you have eliminated potential lawn problems such as the ones caused by faulty sprinkler systems and chinch bugs, then you can start

considering diseases. Summer leaf spot diseases on St. Augustinegrass include gray leaf spot, Helminthosporium leaf spot and Cercospora leaf spot which can be controlled with Immunox (myclobutanol). Diseases with a circular pattern such as brown patch, dollar spot and, to some extent, take-all root rot can be controlled with Bayleton (triadimefon) applied as directed on the label. These two products can be found at most retail garden centers.

USING NATIVE PLANTS IN THE LANDSCAPE

by Anne Yasalonis
Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program

As summer heats up, many people want to spend as little time as possible doing upkeep in their landscape. Endless hours of pruning and watering are not favorable in the summer heat. Many plants begin to show their wear as a result of the hot weather. Using native Florida plants in the correct place can help you reduce both of these time and money consuming tasks. There are many plants that are great native plants in central Florida. We have many of them on display in the demonstration gardens at the Extension Office in Bartow. Here are a few that you may enjoy in your landscape:



Gaillardia pulchella or blanket flower is a perennial that matures at 18-36". It has beautiful daisy-like flowers in yellow, orange and red all summer long. It is extremely drought tolerant and likes full sun. Gaillardia also serves as an adult nectar plant for butterflies and will re-seed itself each year. You may collect the seeds to share with fellow gardeners.

Salvia coccinea or scarlet sage is a perennial

that grows 2-3' tall. It produces beautiful red flowers all summer long in the full sun. Scarlet sage is very drought tolerant and is also an adult butterfly nectar plant. This plant is beautiful with Lantana or Daylilies.

Stachytarpheta jamaicensis or porterweed is another great Florida native plant. It is a 2-3' tall bushy perennial that produces purple flowers all summer. It is a very drought tolerant plant and lives in full sun. This plant also serves as an adult butterfly nectar plant and looks great planted with the aforementioned plants.

Many native plants flower all summer, are very drought tolerant, and attract native wildlife such as butterflies. Check your local native nursery for these and other native plants. If you have an interest in Florida's native plants, join your local Florida Native Plant Society (<http://fnps.org>). You may also obtain more information at the upcoming "Landscaping with Natives" workshop that will be held at the Extension Service on September 4th. For any additional information on this or other Florida Yards and Neighborhoods topics, please contact the Polk County Florida Yards and Neighborhoods program at (863) 519-8677 ext. 121.

MOSS ROSE

One of my favorite summer plants is the moss rose - Portulaca grandiflora. It is also known as rose moss, sun plant and portulaca and is in the purslane family. Not to be confused with related purslane, P. oleraceae, which can be a weed problem in some situations. However, P. oleraceae has been cultivated as a food crop in many parts of the world for hundreds of years and is high in vitamins A, B1 and C.



Moss rose, P. grandiflora, is a trailing, semi-succulent plant with multi-branched stems and leaves. The rose-like flowers are about an inch in diameter and come in bright colors like yellow, red, pink, orange and white. The flowers open fully during the day and seem to enjoy the hot summer sun. The flowers close up at night or on cloudy days.

A number of cultivars are available and some have double flowers such as Sundance which are 2 inches across. The Sundial cultivars also bloom in cloudier weather and come in a wide variety of colors. Another Sundial cultivar, "Afternoon Delight" stays open longer in the afternoon. They can be planted in the garden, put in planters or suspended in hanging baskets.

Moss rose grows well in poor sandy soil, but the soil needs to be well drained. Aphids and nematodes can be a problem. Aphids can be controlled with insecticidal soap, however the only treatment for nematodes would be to sun solarize the soil before planting. They flower best in full sun and are quite drought tolerant, however they perform best with regular watering.

They are annuals and self seed themselves each year or you can collect the seed and start your own plants. The seeds are extremely small so the best procedure is to mix them with sand before seeding. New plants can be started from cuttings as needed.

MISC. JULY GARDENING

Flowers to plant - Angelonia, begonia, black-eyed Susan, blue daze, bush daisy, cat's whiskers, coleus, coreopsis, crossandra, golden globe, impatiens, marigold, melampodium, moon flower, pentas, periwinkle, porterweed, portulaca, purslane, salvia, sunflower, torenia and zinnia.

Herbs to plant - Anise, basil, bay laurel, chive, dill, ginger, lemon balm, Mexican tarragon, mint, oregano, rosemary, sage, sweet marjoram and thyme.

Vegetables to plant - Boniato, calabaza, cherry tomato, okra, Southern pea, Seminole pumpkin, sweet cassava and sweet potatoes.

Vegetable seeds - Now is the time to start tomato, eggplant and pepper seed for late August and early September plantings. I have effectively used peat pellets for starting seed. These pellets are compressed and when put in water they expand to a height of 2 inches. When the seedlings are 4-6 weeks old, they can be planted directly into a large pot or into the ground.

pH - As you are planning your fall vegetable garden, now is the time to have a soil test done to determine the acidity or alkalinity of your soil. Garden pH should be about 6.5. Don't just routinely add dolomite to raise the pH because you think the soil is too acid or sulfur to lower the pH because you think the soil is too sweet or alkaline. You could make things a lot worse by adding dolomite or sulfur at the wrong time.

The Master Gardeners conduct soil pH tests each week on Thursday at the Extension Office for \$3.00 per sample. The sample(s) can also be sent to the University of Florida for a pH determination and nutrient determination for \$7.00 per sample.

Pruning - You will find many dead and/or declining branches in your perennials, shrubs and trees. Now is a good time to prune out these limbs so insects and disease cannot get established in these weakened areas.

New plantings - Now is a good time to replace dead and dying shrubs and trees. Replace old plants with water wise plants. The Extension Office has many available

publications on water wise plants. Many of these plants are growing in our demonstration gardens.

Mulching - Replace old mulch under trees and shrubs. The old mulch needs to be broken up if it has formed an impervious layer, and new mulch placed on top so there is a total of 2-3 inches.



Since I mentioned that the Polk County Master Gardeners might sell FloriMulch, which is made from Melaleuca or punk trees, I have had many calls expressing interest. As we don't know much about this product, the Master Gardeners have decided to purchase a few bags and use it in a demonstration garden before offering it to the general public, so it's qualities can be evaluated. We currently have a bed mulched with this product at the Extension Office. The general public is welcome to come by any time and take a look at it. I will keep you updated on any new source of this product in Polk County.

Have a good gardening day,

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