


POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

October 2003

PURGE NOTICE AND SURVEY

This month I am including a purge notice with the newsletter. You will need to sign the enclosed form and return it to the Extension Office to be kept on the Urban Horticulturer mailing list. I am also enclosing a survey, which I hope you will fill out and return along with the purge notice. These surveys are very helpful to me when I do my annual report.

PLANTS PREPARE FOR

When there  is a change in the season, there are also changes in plants. In the fall deciduous plants lose their leaves and become dormant for winter. Evergreen plants, those not losing all their leaves in the fall, are also undergoing changes although you may not see signs of these changes.

Azaleas may lose a few leaves now. These are the older leaves on the stem near the center of the plant. They turn reddish and drop from the plant. Don't be alarmed by the loss of a few older azalea leaves from now until spring. However, if the younger leaves, those nearest the tip of the shoot, turn yellow or brown there is cause for concern. Poor drainage, lack of water or alkaline soils may cause this condition.

Be sure to keep azaleas and other ornamental plants well watered during dry weather that may occur from now until spring.

Yellow leaves are showing up on camellias, gardenias, cherry laurel and sweet olive. Again as with azaleas, these are older leaves on the stem near the middle of the plant. It is normal for these leaves to drop from the plants from now until spring. Do not confuse scale damage on camellias for normal aging of leaves. Scale insects feed on the lower surface of camellia leaves causing them to become splotched with yellow.

The leaves of sycamore trees have changed from green to brown. Although this phenomenon occurs every year, it is not caused by a change in day length or temperature and is therefore not considered a true seasonal change. The change in color is the result of insects feeding on the leaves. By the time the damage is visible, there is little that can be done to correct the problem. However, this problem will take care of itself since sycamore trees will soon be dropping their leaves.

Although Florida is not known for exciting fall color, there are enough temperate region plants to provide some fall color. Many of the pigments that contribute to the bright colors of autumn are present in the leaves from

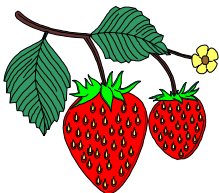


the time they unfold in the spring. During spring and summer the green pigment (chlorophyll) dominates the other pigments and is the major visible color for vigorously growing plants. In the fall, the production of new chlorophyll slows and is finally depleted allowing the other pigments to become more evident. The orange, red, yellow and brown colored leaves are the expressions of the carotenoid pigments. The red, blue and purple anthocyanin pigments are responsible for the red and purple color of dogwoods, sweet gum, red maple, Bradford pear, Loblolly bay and crape myrtles.

Lawngrasses also experience some seasonal changes. Much to the delight of most of us, the growth rate of lawngrasses decreases in the fall. Although this slow grow means less mowing is required, it also means that lawns will not be as attractive as they were during the spring and summer. Because of this reduced growth rate, grasses cannot produce enough new leaves to replace the leaves that are dying naturally or being damaged by foot traffic.

Bermudagrass and centipedegrass will turn brown with the arrival of the first frost. St. Augustinegrass will turn purplish as a result of cool temperatures and light frost. With freezing temperatures, St. Augustinegrass will turn brown in unprotected areas.

STRAWBERRIES



Now is a good time to start thinking about planting strawberries. They can be grown in just about any soil type, however they don't do as well in peat or muck. They like a well drained soil that is moist, but not wet. So, sandy soil that has plenty of organic matter is best.

Select a cultivar that is well developed to Florida conditions, such as Florida 90, Tioga, Sequoia, Florida Belle, Dover or Chandler.

They should be planted as soon as possible in raised beds, which are two feet wide and spaced two feet apart. The beds should be mounded, so they are six inches high along the edges and about eight inches high in the middle.

For a ten-by-ten foot strawberry patch, broadcast about 2 ½ pounds of 6-8-8 fertilizer and work it into the soil. Then, form the beds, and apply another 2 ½ pounds of fertilizer. The second application of fertilizer should be placed in a narrow band about 6 inches deep in the middle of each bed. Also, during the first season of strawberry production include a complete mixture of minor elements in the fertilizer application.

After the beds have been properly formed, fertilized and well moistened, cover each with a sheet of 1 ½ mil black polyethylene plastic. This is the typical black mulch used for strawberries in Florida. Place soil on the edges of the plastic to hold it in place. Then cut slits in the plastic where the plants are to be inserted.

The plants should be set in double rows - one on each side of the bed, about 6 inches from the edge. Space the plants 12 inches apart in the rows. Be sure that no plants are set directly over the fertilizer band, because this can lead to salt burn.

Always start with certified, disease free plants. Keep them moist before planting and plant them in moist soil. Set them at the correct depth. Do not cover the crowns and do not leave tops of roots exposed. Spread the roots in a fan shape, and pack soil firmly around them. With a little luck and proper maintenance, you should be enjoying strawberries next spring.

CITRUS

The last application of citrus fertilizer for the year should be made. Use one pound citrus fertilizer (6-6-6) per year of tree growth up to eight years old. Spread fertilizer evenly under the drip line and 6-8 inches from the trunk.

I have received several calls from homeowners that have experienced considerable leaf drop on their Minneola tangelos, otherwise know as Honeybells. This was diagnosed as a fungus disease called Alternaria which infests new growth starting in the spring after petal fall. Left untreated, the fungus attacks new flushes of growth through the summer and can cause severe defoliation on some cultivars such as Minneola tangelos and Dancy tangerines. The lesions on the leaves are brown surrounded by yellow areas.

If you have a Honeybell dropping its leaves now, any new flushes of growth this year should be sprayed with copper to protect that growth. You also could have a problem next spring, so make copper sprays 2-3 weeks after petal fall and then every 2-3 weeks until the end of June. However, keep in mind that foot rot also causes leaves to drop prematurely. Foot rot will eventually kill the tree. If you are in doubt, bring a leaf specimen to the Extension Office.

THE GRASS ISN'T ALWAYS GREENER!

By Anne Yasalonis,
Florida Yards and Neighborhoods

Many people in Florida are constantly battling their grass. It uses too much water, has pest and disease problems or is overtaken by obnoxious weeds. There may be an easier way! Groundcovers can be a substitute for grass in many areas of the landscape. In central Florida there are some great groundcovers for use in the home landscape. Many will provide year-round color and survive in the shade where your grass did not.

The main objective when choosing a groundcover is to choose a low-maintenance plant. Do your research and make sure to plant your plant in the right place!

Check your local nursery for some of the following groundcovers:

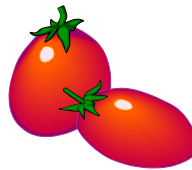
- i Asiatic Jasmine – A great low growing, evergreen groundcover. Will form a “mat” that will shade out potential weeds. It will grow in sun or shade.
- i Ferns – Boston, Holly, Leatherleaf and Sword ferns are recommended for shady groundcovers. They will cover an area and thrive under shady oak trees.
- i Lantana – This is a beautiful sun-loving groundcover. It will produce flowers all year long and it needs very little maintenance. Give it plenty of room to grow.
- i Mondo Grass – Often used as an edging plant, Mondo grass grows beautifully in shady locations and will stay green all year long.

To obtain a list of more central Florida groundcovers, go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> and search for groundcovers or contact the Polk County Extension Service.

MISC. OCTOBER GARDENING

Vegetables to plant - Beet, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, celery, collards, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, onion, peas, potato, radicchio, radish, rhubarb, roquette, rutabaga, spinach, strawberry, Swiss chard and turnip.

If you are planting tomatoes or peppers in buckets this fall and winter, you may be having a problem with bacterial diseases such as bacterial speck and spot. The lesions from these diseases are angular with a water soaked margin. Control is just about impossible. The only relief is dryer weather.



Bacterial spot and speck can be transmitted on

the seed. In many cases, the transplants you buy from retail garden centers may already be infested. I suggest that you try starting the plants from seed.

Herbs to plant - Anise, basil, bay laurel, borage, cardamom, chervil, chives, coriander, dill, fennel, garlic, lavender, lemon balm, lovage, mint, nasturtium, oregano, rosemary, sage, sweet marjoram, tarragon, thyme and water cress.

Flowers to plant - African daisy, alyssum, angelonia, ageratum, begonia, black-eyed Susan, blue daze, calendula, candytuft, celosia, chrysanthemums, cleome, cornflower, cosmos, dianthus, dusty miller, gaillardia, gazania, geraniums, gerbera, heliotrope, hollyhock, impatiens, larkspur, lobelia, nicotiana, pentas, petunia, salvia, snapdragon, sunflower, sweet pea and zinnia.



It is a little too early to plant pansies, but you may want to sow seeds now for transplanting in November.

Day length - Days become short enough in about mid-October to trigger the flowering process. Be careful that your poinsettias, holiday cactus and kalanchoes receive only natural daylight. Even a short burst of light at night from street, porch or in-home light can stop or delay the flowering process.

Start checking your holiday cactus for greenish swelling buds at the ends of the stems. They are small and bead-like at first, but later become enlarged and pointed as they develop their color. If your cactus is not receiving night time light, then you should start seeing buds by the first of November.

Cold susceptible plants - The cooler nights are a reminder that 40-50 degree temperatures are not far away. So, be sure to bring in those

very susceptible plants like pothos, aglaonema, episcias, heliconia peperomia and dieffenbachia. Most of these will be damaged by 40 degree F temperature. Episcias are often damaged in only 50 degree temperatures.

Trees - We are still in the hurricane season, so now might be a good time to check out your trees for weaknesses. Look for dead limbs that could fall off the tree and damage people or property. Check for hollow areas that could weaken the tree. Bark peeling off the tree could mean that the tree is in a weakened condition. Limbs that form a V could split in heavy winds. Trunks should form a distinct U shape.



Bract or shelf fungus on the base of the tree means that the interior of the tree has fungus growth. Sap flowing freely out of the tree (slime flux) means the tree has some sort of an infection which could be weakening the tree. Consult with an arborist if your tree has one or more of the above conditions.

Have a good gardening day,

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