

POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

January - 2004

Dear Readers,

I am in the process of setting up a List Serv for sending out the Urban Horticulturer by e-mail to those who requested this service. At the present time this process is not in place. So for the next couple of months, you will continue to receive the newsletter by regular mail. I will notify you when the List Serv is in place.

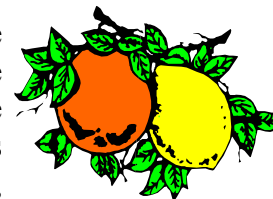
A few month ago, I was asked to write a story for the Tampa Tribune on establishing and maintaining a dooryard citrus garden. Since many of you probably don't receive the Tampa Tribune in the Polk County area I thought I would include it in this month's Newsletter.

THE DOORYARD CITRUS GARDEN

If you want to create a citrus garden in your landscape, you first must decide how much available space you want to commit to your garden. Then decide what type of citrus you enjoy the most. The trees need to be planted in full sun, however trees planted in partial shade often produce an adequate number of fruit for homeowners. Ideally, they should be planted 15-20 feet apart and not closer than 25 feet from the house.

However, people with limited space can plant citrus cultivars with similar growth habits 3-4 feet apart, such as three cultivars of sweet oranges or three cultivars of grapefruit. The trees will not perform as well as when planted 15-20 feet apart, but the homeowner should have enough fruit for his own use. When citrus trees with different growth habits are grouped close together, such as oranges and grapefruit, they may need constant pruning to keep one tree from outgrowing the other. This is often the case when several types of citrus cultivars are budded onto one rootstock (fruit cocktail tree) or when 2-3 citrus trees are planted in one hole.

Many citrus cultivars are available to the homeowner. There are sweet orange cultivars that ripen in the fall, winter and spring, so sweet oranges can be enjoyed for most of the year. For example, Hamlin and Navel cultivars mature in the fall, Pineapple and Midsweet mature in the winter and Valencia mature in the spring.



The homeowner has a choice of planting a number of delicious tasting grapefruit to go along with the sweet oranges. There are a number of cultivars to choose from including the red varieties such as Redblush and Star Ruby and the white cultivars such as Marsh and

Duncan. The different cultivars mature from November through June and have distinct and delicious flavors.

The third group to be considered for the citrus garden are tangerine and tangerine hybrids. Tangerine cultivars include Dancy, Fallglow, Sunburst, Robinson and many others, while tangerine hybrids include the tangelos and tangors.

The tangelo is a cross between a grapefruit and a tangerine. Typical tangelos are the Minneola or Honeybell which has a pronounced neck at the stem end, and is well known for its delicious taste, plus the Orlando Tangelo which can be easily recognized by its cup shaped leaves. Tangor hybrids, such as Temple oranges and Murcotts (Honey Tangerines) are crosses between sweet oranges and tangerines. With the proper selection of tangerine and tangerine hybrids, the homeowner can have fruit through most of the fall, winter and early spring.

The citrus garden would not be complete without some of the acid fruit such as Persian lime, Key lime, Meyer and Bearss lemons. These trees usually bear fruit throughout the year with the bulk of the fruit coming in the summer. The acid fruit trees are more cold sensitive than typical oranges and grapefruit. Key limes make great pies and Persian limes and lemons are great for flavoring food and various cold drinks.

Other citrus trees that may be of interest to the homeowner are calamondins and kumquats. The calamondin is a cross between a sour mandarin and a kumquat. The fruit are used in jellies and the trees are sometimes sold in containers as miniature oranges. The two common kumquats, Nagami and Meiwa are often found in the landscape and are quite cold tolerant. The Nagami or oblong kumquat has an acid taste and a bright orange color, while the Meiwa kumquat has large round fruit which are sweet and good to eat and are used for preserves and candied fruit.

Once the trees and locations have been selected, the homeowner can proceed with planting. Citrus may be planted any time of the year, but the preferred times are the fall and spring. Dig the planting hole somewhat wider and deeper than the root ball. About 1/3 of the potting soil should be removed from the root ball and mixed with native sandy soil in the planting hole. In order to keep the root ball slightly above the soil level, build up the bottom of the planting hole with the sand/potting soil mix, and then slowly back-fill around the exposed roots with native sandy soil. As the planting hole is being filled with soil, use water to wash the soil into the exposed roots until the planting hole is filled with a water-sand slurry. Finally, build a basin around the root ball large enough to hold 5-10 gallons of water. Fill the basin with water twice per week for the first month, and then less often, until the tree is established.



Care of established citrus trees in the home landscape can amount to nothing more than fertilizing and watering at appropriate times. Generally a citrus fertilizer applied at recommended rates 3 times per year will provide adequate nutrition for the tree. Rainfall and lawn irrigation will normally give the trees sufficient water throughout most of the year, however additional watering may be needed during dry periods such as in April, May and October.

Insects and mites can be a problem for dooryard citrus at certain times of the year, but many productive trees receive little pest control and produce a sufficient number of fruit each year for the homeowner. Beneficial insects often give adequate control of mealybugs, aphids, whiteflies and scales. If one or more of these sucking insects gets out of control, evidenced by black sooty mold, then an application of horticultural oil will give sufficient control. Horticultural oils are much less damaging to beneficial parasites and predators than other insecticides.

Fortunately, most common diseases of citrus, such as scab, melanose and Alternaria are not serious problems for the homeowner. They do not affect the quality of the fruit and generally require little or no treatment. If treatment becomes necessary, these diseases can be controlled with a applications of copper at 2-3 week intervals starting a few weeks after petal fall in the spring. Greasy spot, on the other hand, is a fungus disease that attacks citrus leaves in the summer months and at times can cause severe defoliation in the late winter or early spring. We therefore recommend an application of copper or horticultural oil to all homeowner trees at the end of June or the first of July for control of greasy spot.

Other more serious disease problems of citrus trees include foot rot, Tristeza virus and citrus blight. Foot rot is a fungus disease often entering tree trunks through wounds caused by careless weed whacking and lawn mowing and may eventually may kill the tree. Citrus blight is not well understood, but the disease clogs up the tree's vascular system and the tree eventually dies. Tristeza is a virus disease, transmitted by aphids, that attacks trees grafted on sour orange root stock. It also eventually kills the tree. Fortunately, these problems are not very common on homeowner citrus trees.

More detailed information can be found on the Polk County Horticultural Web Site <http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu> and the University of Florida Web Site <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>. Good luck with your citrus garden.

Don't forget that January is the month for the first application of fertilizer to mature trees (5 years and older). The rule of thumb is to apply one pound of a 6-6-6 citrus fertilizer per year of age of the tree up to 8 years old. In other words a tree that is 5 years old would receive 5 pounds of fertilizer and a tree that is 10 years old would receive 8 pounds of fertilizer. Do not fertilize trees younger than 5 years old until March.

Spread the fertilizer evenly under the drip line

of the tree and out from the drip line a few feet, if possible. Keep the fertilizer 8-10 inches out away from the base of the trunk. I don't recommend that you use fertilizer spikes or that you dig holes in the ground under the drip line and place fertilizer in the holes. There are still many homeowners using these practices which are basically ineffective, because the fertilizer leaches more or less straight down leaving a large percentage of the feeder roots without fertilizer.



TURF

Establishing new sod in winter -

The University generally recommends laying sod in the summer months, however sod, particularly in new homes, may also be laid in the winter time. So how should a homeowner take care of sod laid in the winter time?

Unfortunately, little research data exists, but the general feeling of university horticulturists is that the new sod needs extra irrigation to enhance establishment, as does sod laid in the summer. Water as you would in the summer, but reduce amounts by about 20 - 30%.

After the sod has pegged down, apply 1/4 to 1/2 pounds of slow release nitrogen per 1000 square feet. That calculates out to be 1.5 to 3.0 pounds per 1000 square feet of a 15-5-15 fertilizer. Then, hold off further fertilizing until early to mid March.

No mowing should be done until the sod is established, and then only a light clipping to take off any needed growth.

Watering established lawns in winter months

For established lawns that appear to be growing to some extent in winter months, water when you see drought stress symptoms like wilting as you would in the summer - probably once every other week to once per week. You don't want to keep the turf too wet and encourage disease like brown patch. If the grass is totally dormant,

water every 2-3 weeks because the roots are still alive and growing and need water.

TERMITES

January is the month when you start to see swarming subterranean termites. The females mate and then start looking for a place to start a new colony. Drywood termites have been known to swarm in January, but it is unusual. Many people are unable to distinguish between a termite and an ant. Remember, an ant has elbowed antennae, a constricted waist between the thorax and abdomen and front wings larger than the rear wings, while termites have beaded antennae, a broad waist between the thorax and abdomen and similar sized wings. If you are not sure what you have, bring a sample to the Extension Office and I will examine them for you.

MISC JANUARY GARDENING

Herbs to be planted - Anise, bay laurel, cardamon, chives, coriander, fennel, garlic, ginger, lavender, mint, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, sweet marjoram, thyme and watercress.

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

Flowers to plant - Alyssum, baby's breath, calendula, cleome, candytuft, carnation, delphinium, dianthus, dusty miller, foxglove, gaillardia, godetia, hollyhock, Iceland poppy, lobelia, nasturtium, ornamental cabbage and kale, pansy, petunia, shasta daisy, statice, stock and sweet pea.

Arbor Day - Don't forget that there are two Arbor Days. One is the Florida Arbor Day

which is the 3rd Friday of January which would be January 16th in Florida this year. There is a U.S. Arbor Day which is the last Friday in April. The end of January is an excellent time of the year to plant a tree in Florida. The cooler time of the year gives the tree roots plenty of time to establish new roots before the really hot months of late spring and summer are upon us. Remember to keep away from drain fields, side walks and houses. Smaller trees and shrubs, such as crape myrtles, Chinese elm, Fringe tree, glossy privet, loquat, and orchid trees have less invasive roots. Check the UF EDIS Web Site for Ornamental Trees for Central Florida (ENH-28) or call the Extension Office.

FYN EXTENSION PROGRAMS FOR FEBRUARY AND MARCH

Larry Jackson Library, Lakeland - Tuesdays and Thursdays at 6:30-7:45 pm
January 27th "Creating Rain Barrels" (\$15.00)
January 29th "Florida Friendly Fertilizing"
February 3rd "Aquascaping"
February 5th "Stormwater Runoff"

Springhaven Retirement Center, Winter Haven Tuesdays and Thursdays at 6:30-7:45 pm
February 10th "Stormwater Runoff"
February 12th "Fertilizing"
February 17th "Aquascaping"
February 19th "Creating Rain Barrels"(\$15.00)

Have a good gardening day,
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For Polk County Gardening Information:
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Polk County Web Site:
<http://polk.ifas.ufl.edu>

