

POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

February 2004

EXTENSION PROGRAMS



I will be doing a series of homeowner programs in February and March. These programs are free and open to the public. They will be offered on Tuesdays at the Extension Office in Bartow (1702 Hwy. 17 South), running from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. The programs will be as follows: February 17th - "Home Lawn Management", February 24th - "Insects In and Around" the Home", March 2nd - "Dooryard Citrus" and March 7th - "Pests and Diseases of Home Landscape Plants". I also plan to do a program on citrus bud grafting, probably in late March.

We are halfway through our FYN Backyard Water Conservation Programs. I will be doing programs on "Proper Fertilizing". The presentations will be at the Spring Haven Retirement Home on Highway 17 in Winter Haven on February 12th from 6:30 to 7:45 p.m. and at the Lake Wales Library on March 4th at the same time in the evening.

Anne Yasalonis has two more rain barrel programs - one will be at the Spring Haven Retirement Center in Winter Haven on February 19th and the other will be at the Lake

Wales Public Library on March 11th. Both programs start at 6:30 and end at 7:45 p.m. If you want a rain barrel to take home, then there is a \$15.00 fee and preregistration is required. However, you can come to the lecture only, for free.

John Brenneman, substituting for Bud Othoson, has two more programs on "Aquascaping" - one will be at the Spring Haven Retirement Center on February 17th and the other will be at the Lake Wales Public Library on March 9th. Both programs will start at 6:30 and end at 7:45 p.m. John, who is a Natural Resources Extension Agent, will cover lakefront plant establishment and maintenance.

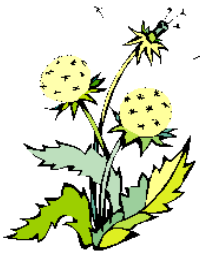
John also has two more programs on "Stormwater Runoff and Your Backyard" - one will be at the Spring Haven Retirement Center on February 10th and the other at the Lake Wales Library on March 2nd. The programs start at 6:30 and end at 7:45 p.m.

TURF

If you want to have a good looking St. Augustine or Bahiagrass lawn, I encourage you to follow "Best Management Practices" for turf as closely as possible. Sometimes this is difficult as our oak trees continue to grow

and give more shade and lawn mowing services are going to only mow once per week in the summer when twice would be better. Sprinkler system heads may be broken from careless mowing and irrigation systems may not be calibrated. As a result, turf may be over or under watered. These poor maintenance practices often lead to unexpected weed, insect and disease problems.

Preemergence weed killer - Lawns can become so infested with weeds that we have little choice but to use a weed killer. We don't recommend that you use a weed and feed product, because some herbicides need to be applied in February while fertilizer needs to be applied in March. You often get the wrong rate of fertilizer or the wrong rate of herbicide. And most of these "weed and feed" products have high nitrogen (27-28%) and low potassium (6-7%). University researchers feel strongly that you should apply the same amounts of nitrogen and potassium, because the potassium builds strong roots and increases drought tolerance. Also, with a "weed and feed" product you have to make the application to the whole lawn and your whole lawn may not be infested with weeds.



Mid-February is the recommended time to make applications of preemergence weed killers. These products kill the weed seed just after they germinate, so they must be applied before the seed germinate. This is tricky because germination of weed seed depends on the weather and most preemergence herbicides have short residual activity in the soil, so timing is critical.

To control grassy weeds in St. Augustine and bahiagrass, look for products with pendimethalin (Pendulum, Pre-M, Turf Weedgrass Control or Halts Crabgrass

Preventer). These products are generally grassy weed killers, but will control a few broadleaf weeds. Make two applications, one in February and again 60 days later. A fall application can also be made. These products are generally available at most retail garden centers.

The combination product benfin and trifluralin (Sta-green Crabgrass Preventer and Hi-Yield Crabgrass Preventer), which is a good product, may control a few more broadleaf weeds, such as Oxalis and spurge, than trifluralin or pendimethalin applied alone. Make two applications of this combination product - one in mid-February and a second 60 days later. This product is available at Peterson's Nursery and other selected garden centers. A second product that gives grassy weed control and some extended broadleaf control is Barricade (prodiamine).

Postemergence - There are a number of 2,4-D type products that can be used postemergence on Bahiagrass (2,4-D plus dicamba plus MCPP, MCPA and/or 2,4-DP). Many of the 2,4-D type product labels state that they can be safely used postemergence on St. Augustinegrass, but UF researchers feel that if used there is a good chance of phytotoxicity, so we recommend their use be only on Bahiagrass.

Atrazine is still the best choice for control of broadleaf weeds in St. Augustinegrass, but it will not control many grassy weeds. The recommendation is to make one application in early spring (February) and then a second 30 days later, but not later than April 15th. Do not use Atrazine on Bahiagrass.

I'm often asked if it is O.K. to make an application of Atrazine during the same time frame as applications of pendimethalin or trifluralin for maximum grassy and broadleaf weed control. I don't know of any huge problem using multiple applications of

Atrazine and grass type herbicides during the same season, but I would be more comfortable alternating these products from season to season or from year to year. I think we are already tempted to use more herbicides on our turf than we should.

NATIVE TREES FOR THE HOME LANDSCAPE

It is a great time in Florida to plant trees. There are so many selections that it can be overwhelming when it comes to choosing a few to plant in your yard. Always remember to plant the right tree in the right place!

Sycamore trees are large native trees often seen planted in street medians or along roadsides. This is because they are tough! This fast growing tree is best for a large yard because it can reach 150' in height. The beautiful peeling bark is one of its best attributes.

Red Maples are a great specimen tree for a large yard. They will grow to about 70' tall and grow particularly well in moist sites. Red Maples have gorgeous red leaves in the fall prior to leaf drop.

Fringetree is a great choice if you have a small yard. It will grow to about 30' tall and is covered with white blooms in the spring.

River Birch is another fast growing tree that makes a great specimen in your landscape. It can reach 40-80' in height and does best in moist soils. The white peeling bark and multi-trunk form make it a great addition to any landscape.

For more information on Native trees to plant in your yard, contact the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods program at the Polk County Extension Service.

CRAPE MYRTLES

History - There are 56 species native to woodlands and forests of India, China and Southeast Asia. The commonly cultivated species are *Lagerstroemia indica*, *L. speciosa*, *L. fauriei* and numerous hybrids. Until recently, the most widely grown species of crape myrtle was *L. indica* which was cultivated in ancient China and was introduced into the U.S. in the early 1800's.



In addition to their durability and beauty as ornamental plants, crape myrtles have medicinal and functional uses. Some species are logged commercially for timber in India and Malaysia, but are threatened in Burma and Thailand from over logging. Extracts from some species' plant parts reportedly have medicinal uses. Extracts from *L. speciosa* are now found in over-the-counter supplements.

Breeding programs - The original *Lagerstoremia indica* plants had a few undesirable traits, such as susceptibility to powdery mildew, dead heading required for new blooms, and size availability limited to large shrubs or small trees. These defects gave breeders reasons to improve crape myrtles. Current breeding programs have developed resistance to powdery mildew and improved plant vigor and hardiness. Also, developed were ornamental bark and foliage, a wide range of flower colors and a diverse range of plant sizes and shapes.

Flower colors - Cultivars were developed with bicolor flowers, such as Prairie Lace with pink edged in white, Candy cane with pink edged in white, Raspberry Sundae with dark pink edged in white and Splash of Pink with a

mix of pink, white and bicolor flowers.

Unusual flower color was developed in many cultivars such as true red color (Petite Red Imp, Victor, Carolina Beauty and Dynamite), deep red (Arapaho, Centennial Spirit and Christiana), watermelon red (Houston, World's Fair and Watermelon Red), reddish lavender (Lipan), magenta purple (Velma's Delight), shell pink (Near East), lavender pink (Muskogee, Basham's Party Pink), bubble gum pink (Caddo), coral pink (Comanche and Tuscarora) and hot pink (Fire Bird and Pink Velour).

Plant size - Crape myrtles are now available in 4 sizes - dwarf (under 4 feet in 5 years), semi dwarf (4-12 feet in 10 years), intermediate (12-20 feet in 10 years) and tree (20 plus feet in 10 years). The following is a list of cultivars recommended for Florida: dwarf cultivars include Delta Blush (pink), New Orleans (purple), Pocomoke (rose) and Houston (rose pink); semi-dwarf cultivars include Acoma (white), Caddo (bubble-gum pink), Hopi (pink) and Tonto (red); intermediate cultivars include Osage (pink), Dynamite (true red), Sioux (pink), Pink Velour (burgandy foliage) and Apalachee (lavender) and recommended tree cultivars include Bilioxi (light pink), Choctaw (pink), Fantasy (white with red bark) and Natchez (white).

Pruning - If you have not already done so, now is the time to prune your crape myrtles. There is no need to give your plants a harsh pruning. Heavy pruning delays flowering by stimulating the plant to produce excessive vegetative growth before setting flower buds. Thin plants to 3, 5 or 7 main trunks, remove last seasons seed pods, remove small spindly stems starting to grow from the base of the plants, make all pruning cuts back to a point along the stem up to an inch in diameter and thin out twiggy growths along the trunks.

Fertilize with a 6-6-6 or similar product after pruning and keep plants watered. You should have flowers in May.

MISC. FEBRUARY GARDENING

Vegetables to plant - We are rapidly running out of time for planting cool season vegetables. You can still plant beets, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, celery, collards, endive, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, peas, potatoes, radish and turnips for the next couple of weeks. Towards the end of February, plant beans, cantaloupe, corn, cucumber, eggplant, luffa, pepper, pumpkin, squash, tomato, and watermelon. Keep in mind it is still possible to get a freeze in later February and early March.



Flowers to plant - Alyssum, aster, baby's breath, begonia, candytuft, carnation, calendula, coneflower, coreopsis, cosmos, dahlia, delphinium, dianthus, dusty miller, false heather, four o'clock, gaillardia, gaura, gazania, geranium, gerbera, godetia, Johnny-jump-up, lobelia, nasturtium, pansy, petunia, rose, salvia, snapdragon, Stoke's aster, sweet pea, veronica and yarrow.

Herbs to plant - Anise, basil, borage, chives, dill, fennel, lemon balm, mint, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, sweet marjoram, tarragon and thyme.

Have a good gardening day,

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<http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu>

Polk County Web Site

<http://polk.ifas.ufl.edu>