

POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

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Dear Reader: Last month I included an article on butterfly gardening which was more or less generic for all of Florida. Two of our readers, Linda and Buck Cooper, sent a piece of literature to me on butterfly gardening which relates more specifically to Polk County. I have attached their literature to this newsletter for your perusal. I think you will find it useful.

PLANT DISEASES

Apparently, summer is here with the high temperatures and afternoon thunderstorms. And with the rains, which we need so much, come problems with plant diseases. This is a reality, experienced by many new residents in Florida who have had disease free gardens up north.

Plant diseases come in many forms and disguises. What appears to be a plant disease may be caused by environmental conditions, such as air pollution, lightening, or nutrient deficiencies. Many problems with palms appear to be disease, but actually are nutrient deficiencies. Actual plant diseases are caused by living organisms such as fungi, bacteria and viruses.

The fact that a fungus is found on a plant does

not necessarily mean that the fungus is going to harm the plant. Sooty mold, for example, is a black fungus often found on the leaves of gardenias, citrus trees and many other plants. However, sooty mold is not a plant disease and usually not harmful to the plant although it is quite unsightly. The sooty mold grows on the “honey dew” excreted by certain sucking insects, such as aphids, scales, mealybugs and whiteflies. When you see the black sooty mold, then you probably have an insect problem which can harm the plant and may need treatment with a soap or horticultural oil.

How do plant diseases spread?

Wet weather results in increased disease problems on a number of plants, including lawn grasses. Many fungal and bacterial diseases cannot spread unless the plant is wet for several hours.

Fungus spores will not germinate on dry leaves, and bacteria also need moisture before they infect plants. Some diseases are air borne and may be spread by winds, but splashing water from rain or irrigation is another common way in which plant diseases are spread. Some plants enjoy being misted, but generally it is a good idea to keep water off the plant leaves when watering.



How can we control diseases? Fungicides are helpful in controlling certain plant diseases, but

they must be applied properly to be effective, and specific fungicides cannot control all types fungi, let alone other organisms such as bacteria and viruses. Unlike insecticides, which kill the organisms causing the problem, fungicides generally do not kill the fungus, but merely prevent the disease from spreading to uninfected portions of the plant. Even, if you treat a diseased plant with a fungicide, it is important to remove the diseased portions of the plant if at all possible. Otherwise, the disease will still be present and may spread when the fungicide wears off.



Sanitation, or the removal of the diseased parts of plants, is one of the most important ways of controlling many diseases. Sanitation involves the pruning off of diseased leaves as well as the removal of fallen plant parts. If diseased leaves are left to lie where they fall underneath the plant, the plant can easily be reinfected (black spot on roses).

If you choose to use fungicides, Daconil and copper are two common fungicides which can be used by a homeowner to control fungus infections on ornamental plants. These fungicides protect the uninfected plant tissue from further infection. They need to be regularly applied to new growth (upper and lower leaf surface) or to plant tissue where the fungicide residue has been removed by rain or irrigation.

There are a few systemic fungicides which penetrates the plant tissue and either kill the fungus or protect the plant from further infection, such as Immunox for control of powdery mildew on crape myrtle. Other systemic products include thiophanate methyl, triadimefon and propiconazole which are used for fungus control in turf. These products generally have residual activity for a month or

two and don't need to be reapplied after a rain event.

Before making a fungicide application identify the problem, and make sure that the label on your fungicide product states that it can be used to control the specific disease on your plant. Pesticides which are not applied properly can cause great damage to plants, especially on hot sunny days. If you can't identify the problem, you can bring a few infected plant parts to the Extension Office for us to look at. If we can't identify the problem, then the sample can be sent to the UF Plant Disease Laboratory for further analysis. There is a \$20.00 fee for this laboratory service.

OLEANDERS

Every time I drive on the Polk Parkway I can't help but admire the oleanders growing along the roadway. The plants bloom over a long period of time in the spring and summer with white, pink, red and orange flowers.



You can make use of this waterwise plant in your landscape. The best use for this plant is as a view barrier, or along a property line. They grow up to 15 or so feet tall, but there are dwarf cultivars which can be used as shrubs.

The plant is very drought tolerant and does well in any well drained soil. It tolerates full sun to part shade. It can be pruned as necessary in late February.

On the negative side, oleanders can become infested with oleander caterpillar which when severe will need treatment. Biological insecticides products such as Thuricide and Dipel can be used when the larvae are small, but large larvae will need treatment with a synthetic insecticide.

In addition to the caterpillar problem, all parts of oleanders are poisonous. Children should be taught that these plants are poisonous and to stay away from them. It is probably best to use these plants as backdrops away from easy access by children.

We need to keep in mind that there are numerous plants, besides oleanders, in our Florida environment which are poisonous to people and/or livestock. Hardly a week goes by when I don't have a call about a possible poisonous plant. I need to include a section on poisonous plants in a future newsletter.

Florida Friendly Summer Perennials

by Anne Yasalonis, FYN



There are many choices at the nurseries and garden centers when it comes to summer perennials. When choosing a plant for your landscape it is always important to follow the "right plant, right place" principle. Know your site conditions so that you know

what to look for in a plant. The following plants, available at local nurseries and garden centers will make it through the hot summer months with minimal care.

1. Daylily: These colorful summer bloomers should be planted in full sun. They are very drought tolerant and many cultivars are available. Use in groups as a mass planting for maximum impact.
2. Porterweed: Porterweed is a great drought tolerant perennial available in red, blue and pink. Grow in full sun to partial shade. This is a large perennial so make sure you give it plenty of space.
3. Lantana: There are many types of Lantana available at the local nurseries. The purple or white Lantana are some of the more attractive

species. Lantana is very drought tolerant, blooms profusely all summer and grows in full sun.

4. Society Garlic: The wispy foliage and delicate purple flowers make Society Garlic very attractive. It is a drought tolerant plant for full sun and will bloom all summer long. Remember that this is a garlic so there is a slight odor.

5. Liatris: The unusual spiky blooms on this drought tolerant perennial make it a unique addition to the landscape. Plant in full sun.

MISC. JUNE GARDENING

Flowers to plant - angelonia, begonias, bush daisy, butterfly plant, caladium, cat's whiskers, celosia, coleus, coreopsis, Dahlberg daisy, fire spike, four o'clock, gaillardia, gerbera daisy, ginger, goldenrod, impatiens, kalanchoe, lantana, lion's ear, marigolds, melampodium, Mexican sunflower, moon flower, nierembergia, porterweed, pentas, periwinkle, portulaca, purslane, salvia, shrimp plant, Stokes aster, sunflower, torenia and zinnias.



Vegetables to plant -

boniato, calabaza, chayote, cherry tomatoes, dasheen, malanga, okra, roselle, southern peas, Seminole pumpkin, sweet casava, sweet potato and yard long beans,

Herbs to plant - anise, basil, bay laurel, chives, dill, ginger, marjoram, mint oregano, sage and thyme.

Citrus - If you didn't make your second application of fertilizer in May to mature trees (older than 5 years), then make it now. Apply one pound of a 6-6-6 fertilizer per year of age

of tree up to eight pounds per application. Apply the fertilizer under the drip line of the tree and a few inches out from the trunk. For trees under 5 years old, check our citrus calendar for specific information.

The end of June and the first of July is time to spray copper on all of your citrus trees for control of greasy spot. This fungus disease attacks most types of citrus in the summer and can cause severe leaf drop during the winter months. The fungus actually causes brown, greasy looking spots on leaves and fruit.

Azaleas - Azaleas should be pruned no later than mid to late June. If you wait much longer, flower buds forming for next spring might be pruned from the plants. Start the pruning by removing stems that need to be cut to the ground - this will allow new stems to grow from the base. Cut out thin and spindly shoots. Finally cut the plants back to about a foot from the desired height.



Personally, I like to make what is called drop-crotch pruning cuts to generally reduce the height of shrubs (some horticulturists call it thinning, others call it heading). This is done by pruning the taller stems 6-8 inches back into the canopy to a lateral branch. In addition to reducing plant height, drop-crotch pruning also encourages new growth within the canopy. This gives the shrub canopy an informal look as opposed to a formal look achieved when the plants are evenly trimmed with shears. Shrubs headed back to the same height with shears or trimmers develop new foliage mainly toward the top of the plant - new growth within the canopy is shaded out.

Powdery mildew - Be watching for a snow white covering growing on the leaves and stems of such plants as crape myrtle, squash, roses

and gerberas. The white material is fungal growth with thousands of spores ready to infect other plants. This disease can be severe enough to warrant a fungicide application. Systemic products such as Bayleton and Immunox work well. The disease can be avoided by growing resistant cultivars, making sure plants have good air movement through pruning and proper plant spacing, removing heavily infected plants and keeping all plants as healthy as possible with proper cultural care.

What's Blooming - I recently had a telephone call from a client who asked about a tree in the parking lot by Publix in the Oak Grove Shopping Center in Lakeland. She said the tree had needles for leaves like a pine, had yellow fragrant flowers (it had just bloomed) and was about 15 feet tall and wide. This is the Jerusalem thorn which is considered a zone 8b to 11 plant and stands temperatures down into the low 20's F. The tree has outstanding ornamental features and should be planted more often, however it does have thorns on the trunk or branches and it is susceptible to root rots in areas that are not well drained. Check the UF Horticulture Web Site for more information.



Have a good gardening day,

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For Polk County Gardening Information and Horticultural Links:

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

