

POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

July/August 2004

Vol. IV No. 7 & 8

Dear Reader: We will have a Master Gardener Training program again this year. It will start on September 14. Classes will meet on every Tuesday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. until December 7th. If you are interested, please give me a call and I will send you an application or you can download an application from my web site. There is an \$80.00 fee to cover the cost of books and other materials. The classes will be held at the Extension Office in Bartow.

Also, I will be conducting 2 Saturday morning classes in August. The first class will meet on August 14 - the topic will be "Diagnosing Lawn Problems". The second class will meet on August 21st - the topic will be "Termites and Other Wood Destroying Insects". The programs will be held at the Extension Office from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.

MELALEUCA MULCH - We are taking orders for melaleuca mulch. Anyone interested in purchasing one or more bags, please call us at (863) 519-8677, ext. 109 or 121 to place an order. The price will be \$2.50 for a 2 cubic foot bag.

VEGETABLE GARDENING



Soil solarization - This is about the only treatment available to the home gardener to reduce the population of pests such as nematodes, insects, fungus and weeds in the home garden. June to mid July are the best times to make this treatment when the sun is very hot.

Hoe or roto-till the garden area to break up clods and remove all sticks, roots and clumps. The soil needs to be moist, but not wet. Cover the moist soil with one or two layers of thin, clear plastic with the edges sealed so that heated air does not escape. Sunlight will penetrate the clear plastic and heat the soil underneath. The solarization process will be more effective when two layers of plastic are used. If two layers of plastic are used, they should be separated with sections of PVC pipe so that there is a void of air between the two layers. The air void between the two sheets will act as an insulator and keep the soil temperature higher for a longer period of time than a single sheet. Pests should be killed 6-8 inches down into the soil.

Building a floating hydroponic garden -

This system is really a simple way to raise leafy salad crops (romaine, boston, bibb and leafy lettuce) during the winter months. You could try herbs like basil, and cut flowers like zinnia. Cucumber have also done well, but they must be supported by some sort of trellis. Experiment with other crops!

You can use just about any size container, but I will discuss one which is about 8 feet long and 4 feet wide. Select a site for the frame that is level and free of debris that might puncture the plastic. Make the frame out of pressure treated 2x6's or 2x8's. Screw the frame together and then line it with heavy gauge (6 mil) polyethylene sheeting. The frame needs to be 4 feet plus 1 inch wide and 8 feet plus 1 inch long. Secure one end and side with furring strips to hold the plastic in place.

Place a 4x8 foot sheet of 1½ inch thick styrofoam in the lined frame. Make sure the edges have ample sufficient room to allow the garden to move up and down. If necessary adjust the frame to make it square with the styrofoam. The styrofoam sheet will create a floating platform in the wooden frame you have constructed.

Put 20 gallons of water into the plastic lined frame and then secure the 2 other sides with furring strips. Continue to fill the water garden to a depth of at least 4 inches. Keep track of the total number of gallons of water that you add. Next add a soluble fertilizer such as Peter's 20-20-20 at a rate of 2 teaspoons of fertilizer per gallons of water. In addition, add Epsom salts at a rate of 1 teaspoon per gallon of water. Use a broom to mix the water and fertilizer in the garden or mix the fertilizer in the bucket before adding to the water garden.

Use a hole saw or a sharp knife to cut holes in the styrofoam. A 2 ½ inch hole saw is needed

to drill the holes when using a 3 inch Net Pot or a styrofoam cup with slits cut in the bottom. Optimum plant spacing on the styrofoam sheet would be 6 inches from the sides and 12 inches apart - 32 holes per sheet. The hole size should allow the bottom of the cup to be slightly below (1/8 inch) the underside of the styrofoam. This allow the root mass to wick up the water without being totally submerged, which might lead to the drowning of the root and plant death.

Transplants used in this system should be grown to be fully rooted in a typical soil less media. Transplants can be grown at home in many root ball shapes in a loose media, purchased from garden suppliers, or grown in compressed peat pellets. Place young starter transplants directly into the cups. Use toothpicks, if desired, to hold the transplants in an upright position. Do not add additional soil to the cup or remove soil from the transplant.

For more detailed information go to the EDIS web site and search for the circular on building a floating hydroponic garden or give my office a call and I will send you a copy. Several companies sell materials like Sunshine Hydroponic Garden Center in Orlando. Their web site is www.sunshinehydro.com and their telephone number is (407) 859-7728.

SUMMER CHECKUP

**by Anne Yasalonis, FYN
Coordinator**

Now that the rainy season has begun, there is no need to use your irrigation system. It is a good time to make sure that there are no malfunctions with your system, make repairs and get more familiar with your automatic timer. Here is a maintenance checklist to follow if you use any



type of irrigation system:

1. Check and clean/repair irrigation distribution components monthly. Running all zones for a few minutes just for a visual check is a good idea if you don't set your system to run when you can observe it.
2. Set the controller according to season. In the rainy summer you should be able to turn your system completely off.
3. Check the functioning of the rain shutoff device quarterly during dry season and monthly during the rainy season. If you don't have a rain shutoff device – get one! Florida law requires all systems installed since 1991 to have such a device. Many utilities will even give rebates for installing shutoff devices.
4. Check micro-irrigation filter quarterly. If you notice an emitter not functioning correctly, often it is just the filter. This can usually be corrected by removing the filter and rinsing the debris out.
5. Prune plants and grass around sprinkler heads or raise them to minimize interference with irrigation spray coverage.
6. Replenish organic mulch at least once a year.
7. Calibrate irrigation zones yearly.

To obtain information or assistance in calibrating your sprinkler system please contact the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods program. Contact a professional if you have specific irrigation maintenance questions.

TURF

Insect pests - Chinch bugs are still around so watch for yellow spots to show up in your St. Augustinegrass, particularly along sidewalks and driveways which are the hottest areas.



Now is the time of the year for sod webworms. I have already started to see larvae and adults in my landscape. If you remember, the larvae are gray-green with brown spots on each segment. They feed at night and remain curled up in the soil during the day. Newly hatched larvae skeletonize the grass blades while the older larvae chew on grass blades near the soil surface. Heavily infested areas will look like the grass has been scalped by a lawn mower.

The adults are small tan to gray moths with a wing-span of 3/4 to 1 inch. They do not cause damage. They fly low to the grass when disturbed - particularly when you mow. They hide in shrubs and other sheltered areas during the day, began flying at dusk, and lay eggs randomly on grass at night. Eggs hatch in about a week. The larvae can be controlled with pyrethroid insecticides such as bifenthrin.



Fertilizer - Your grass may be beginning to yellow to some extent. An application of an iron such as Ironite will often green-up the grass without stimulating a lot of new growth. Consider an application of slow release nitrogen, such as Milorganite, in August and a final application of a complete fertilizer in October.

Sugarcane grub - I receive quite a few calls about the cause of a hole in the ground about the size of a quarter. This hole is made by the adult of one of the most damaging white grubs attacking St. Augustinegrass. The adults emerge from the ground, mate and lay more eggs. Additional damage may be made to your lawn by armadillos digging for the grubs. These grubs can be controlled with

applications of Dylox or Bayer Advanced Grub Control for Lawns.

MISC. JULY GARDENING

Flowers to plant -

Angelonia, ageratum, begonia, blue daze, bush daisy, butterfly plant, cat's whiskers, coleus, crossandra, false heather, fire spike, gaillardia, ginger, goldenrod, impatiens, lantana, marigold, melampodium, Mexican petunia, Mexican sunflower, moon flower, pentas, periwinkle, porter weed, portulaca, purslane, salvia, sunflower, torenia and zinnia.



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

Vegetables to plant - Boniato, calabaza, cherry tomato, okra, Southern pea, Seminole pumpkin, sweet cassava, sweet potato, and yard long bean. Start transplants of tomatoes, pepper and okra.

Poinsettias - Now is a good time to take poinsettia cuttings to start new plants. Take 6-8 inch long tip cuttings during the cooler part of the day. Dip the cuttings in rooting hormone and then place them 2-3 inches deep in vermiculate or some type of good potting soil. Place the cuttings in the shade and water once or twice per day. Rooting will be more successful if the cuttings are placed in some sort of mini mist chamber. A small mist chamber can be made from metal coat-hangers and plastic wrap. Make sure the container is kept in the shade at all times. A brief exposure to the sun will cook the cuttings.

Hibiscus - If your woody hibiscus has grown too much and is crowding other plants, now is

a good time to shape it. Prune to open the plant up. This means removing some of the internal shoots to permit good air movement. Use some of the cuttings to start new plants.

Crape myrtles - One of the worst diseases to attack crape myrtles this time of year is powdery mildew. This is a fungus which attacks young tender growth, turning foliage gray white and causing disfigurement of leaves and flower buds. Control can be achieved with recommended fungicides such as Immunox (myclobutanil) applied as per label.

Hybrid cultivars of crape myrtle such as Apalachee (light lavender), Catawba (lavender), Dynamite (red), Hopi (medium pink), Lipan (reddish lavender), Muskogee (lavender pink), Natchez (white), Raspberry sundae (dark pink edged with white), Seminole (medium pink), Sioux (clear medium pink), Tonto (fascia red - a real beauty), Tuscarora (dark coral pink) and Zuni (medium lavender), to name a few, are resistant to powdery mildew, therefore you should not have to treat. However, all varieties will host crape myrtle aphids, but these are easily controlled with Ivory soap and water.

Chrysanthemums - They have produced a lot of growth the last few months and may have a fungus called Septoria leaf spot. The fungus can be controlled with a recommended fungicide such as Daconil.

Have a good gardening day,

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For Polk County Gardening Information and
Horticultural Links:
<http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu>