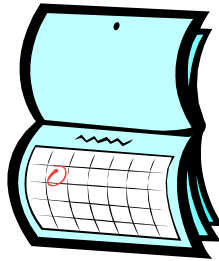


# POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

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**Dear Reader: The Master Gardener Calendars for 2005 are now ready. You will find an order form attached to this newsletter. As you probably know, the calendar is filled with monthly gardening tips, insect advice, and hints on what you should be doing in your garden month-by-month. It makes a great Christmas gift for a newcomer to Florida or an avid gardener. The cost is \$6.00 plus a \$2.00 postage fee.**



**To save on postage, they can also be picked up here at the office in Bartow. If you come by the office, make sure that you take a few minutes and look at our demonstration gardens. We just finished planting 6 different cultivars of medium sized, hybrid crape myrtles - Dynamite (bright red), Hopi (blush white), Seminole (medium pink), Tonto (fuschia red), and Zuni (medium lavender).**

## HURRICANE DAMAGED LANDSCAPES

**What did we learn? Trees that are preventively pruned are less likely to fall than neglected trees. Reducing the length of over-extended limbs and reducing the length of branches and stems with bark inclusions**

lessens the probability of branches breaking from the tree. You will often see this condition of included bark in V branches of trees. The area under the V is often black and raised, is weak and easily split in two with high winds. With proper pruning, the junction of two branches should be U shaped.

Trees blow over in strong winds primarily because 1) roots are rotted or 2) soil becomes soft from rain or 3) a combination of both. Naturally occurring fungi can decay roots, however this condition can be detected by a certified arborist after a careful examination of the tree. Poor drainage or excessive rainfall rates can make the soil soft and unable to hold trees erect.

Trees growing in small spaces blow over - trees with root systems confined to relatively small soil spaces are not as stable as trees allowed to develop more spreading root systems. Roots deflected by a curb make it very susceptible to blowing over in the direction away from the curb. The roots growing in the direction of the wind are largely responsible for holding it up.

Hollow tree may look fine on the outside - trees can have wonderfully intact bark on the trunk and major branches, but they may be entirely hollow inside. Trees with more than 70% of their cross section decayed in the

center are primed to break in high winds.

Palms - Queen palms blow over easily, however they seem to have done pretty well with the recent Polk County hurricanes. Cabbage, royal, and date palms are more resistant to blow over.

Circling roots can mean unstable trees - roots that circle next to or near the trunk were associated with numerous fallen trees. In one case a huge root circled the trunk causing a trunk constriction. This inhibited the root system and root flare from developing properly on one side of the tree and appeared to cause decay in the center of the trunk. Trees with circling roots often blow over in the direction away from the circling root. Sometimes these circling roots have already begun to form in the nursery pots before planting in the landscape. These circling roots should be cut at the time of planting so new roots will grow straight out away from the trunk to help stabilize the tree.

Trees fall down largely in the direction of the wind - most trees fall down in the same direction as the prevailing winds during the storm. Some trees fall over in other directions due to tornadoes, soil conditions, root configuration, and other factors.

Excessive rains make trees unstable - saturated soils allows roots to slide in the soil making them very unstable. This is especially a problem in shallow soils with a high water table.

Old pruning cuts can lead to internal decay - old pruning cuts on numerous species can result in unseen decay inside the trunk and main branches. Large cuts more than about six inches in diameter can become entry points for fungi that begin the decay process. One observed broken tree was



the result of a pruning cut made 23 years ago 50 feet above the ground. The 70 mph winds broke the tree at the weak point created by the decay from the old pruning cut. The cut had completely closed over and decay could not be seen from the outside of the tree.

Laurel oaks - more laurel oaks fell down in the hurricanes than other trees. Many arborists agree that this tree is especially susceptible to blow down. A laurel oak does not compartmentalize decay well, so pruning cuts, trunk injuries, and root damage result in hollows and extensive internal decay.



Shallow roots make trees unstable in storms - trees without deep roots can become unstable and fall over in strong winds. One tree that blew over had very few roots deeper than about 12 inches due to a high water table.

Large trees are more likely to blow over than small trees - although large trees appeared more likely to blow over than small trees, small trees also fell down in hurricane force winds.

Trees with a dominant trunk fared better than trees with several trunks - trees with one trunk up through the canopy have branches considerably smaller than the trunk. In many instances, this strong structure has proved to be better adapted to storms than the codominant stems (multiple V branching). Hire arborists with the ability to create and maintain strong structure in your shade trees by appropriate pruning techniques. This is the best known way to help your tree make it through storms with little damage.

## Common Landscaping Mistakes

by Anne Yasalonis, Florida Yards and  
Neighborhoods Coordinator

Landscaping can be an overwhelming process and if you don't know some of the common mistakes, chances are you will make some of them! Many people begin landscaping projects this time of year and there are important considerations to take into account before you dig the first hole. The "top eight" mistakes are as follows:

### 1. Over-planting or planting too closely.

Remember that your plants will mature. Check with gardening books, your Extension Service, or local nurseries to find out all you can about the plant before you put it into your yard.

### 2. Too many different kinds of plants.

This will make your landscape look busy and confusing. Try to use plants in large groups to "anchor" your landscape. Hollies and Indian Hawthorn are great plants for this.

### 3. Lawn cluttered with trees and shrubs.

If you seem to have this problem, try making large mulched beds for your trees and shrubs. It will make mowing a lot easier, and your plants will be much happier. You don't have to add any extra plants to these beds and your whole landscape will look much neater.

### 4. Shrubs too tall for structure.

Make sure you know the ultimate size of your plants. If you have a one-story house you cannot plant the same tall trees that you would plant for a two or three-story house.

### 5. Plants not grouped by water needs.

This makes watering and setting irrigation zones much easier. Maintenance will be much lower if you follow this tip.

### 6. Plants too close to house.

Make sure you leave at least 12 inches between the edge of plants and your home. This makes it easy if you need to get to your house for maintenance purposes. It also makes your landscape look less crowded.

### 7. Bright colors scattered in yard.

Try and group bright colors together. They will attract the eye, so bright colors are often used by the front door or up the front walk.

### 8. Narrow strips of grass.

If you have narrow strips of grass, it is best to just incorporate them into the nearest bed. Narrow strips of grass are hard to maintain and mow.

Following these suggestions and avoiding the major landscaping mistakes will make your landscape more enjoyable and beautiful. If you have any questions about landscaping, please call the Extension Service or attend a "Landscape Design Basics" workshop.

## COLD PROTECTION

We are quickly moving towards cooler weather. Make sure you have enough sheets, freeze cloth, blankets, etc. to cover all the cold sensitive plants that you want to protect. When a



hard freeze is predicted, water your plants the morning before the predicted freeze. However, you don't want your plants to be wet going into the evening hours. The reason for watering is that the moisture in the wet soil holds more heat than dry soil.

Cover plants so that the material goes all the way to the ground. The idea is to trap enough heat under the cover to protect the plant from the cold during the night. Place weights on the material on the ground so that it doesn't blow. To further retain heat, the sheet, freeze cloth, etc. can be covered with plastic, however do not cover the plants with just plastic as plant parts may be frozen where they are in contact with the plastic.

The effectiveness of covering plants depends to some extent on the wind. During freezes with windy weather, the covers tend to be less

effective because the wind blows the heat away. During windy freezes, the addition of plastic sheeting over the cloth covering may be worth the effort on valuable plants. A light bulb may also be placed under the cover to give additional heat.

Valuable potted plants, which you are unable to adequately cover because of their height and/or predicted windy conditions, may be carefully laid on their side on the ground and then covered with one or two layers of protective material. Several of these plants may be grouped together and placed under an oak tree which will give them additional protection from the cold.

We don't recommend that you use water to protect your landscape from cold weather. A light, but constant flow of water will protect plants, but residential sprinkler systems usually do not have the output capacity needed to protect tender plants. It is true that as water freezes heat is released, thus a continuous coating of ice will keep plants at a temperature of about 33 degrees F. The problem occurs when the water is not applied at a fast enough rate to keep the leaf and fruit temperature above freezing. As a result, cold damage to the plants will be more severe than if nothing at all had been done. Also, running your sprinkler system all night wastes a tremendous amount of water and costs money.

**MISC. NOVEMBER GARDENING**

**Vegetables to plant** - beet, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, celery, Chinese cabbage, collard, endive, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, onion, pea, radicchio, radish, rutabaga, spinach, Swiss chard and turnip.

**Herbs to plant** - anise, arugula, basil, borage,

chive, cardamon, chervil, cilantro, coriander, dill, fennel, garlic, ginger, lemon balm, lovage, Mexican tarragon, mint, nasturtium, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, sweet marjoram, thyme and watercress.

**Flowers to plant** - ageratum, alyssum, baby's breath, black-eyed Susan, bush daisy, calendula, California poppy, carnation, cat's whiskers, chrysanthemum, cleome, cornflower, delphinium, dianthus, dusty miller, foxglove, gaillardia, geranium, goldenrod, heliotrope, hollyhocks, Iceland poppy, impatiens, larkspur, lobelia, ornamental cabbage, kale, pansy, petunia, phlox, salvia, shasta daisy, snapdragon, stock, sweet pea, verbena, viola and wax begonia.

**Pansies in the garden** - Pansies are one of my favorite winter plants. They stand up to the coldest winter weather. They have faces that resemble smiling faces and are available at local garden centers as seed and transplants. They can be planted in a bed or as an accent in a pot. Plant them in a sunny location spaced about six inches apart. Fertilize those in the ground on a monthly basis and those in containers weekly. Water when the soil is dry to the touch.



Have a good gardening day,

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