

# POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

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Dear Reader: We still have copies of the 2005 Master Gardener Calendar. I have enclosed an order form for your convenience. Check my web site calendar - <http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu> - for up-coming spring horticultural programs offered by Anne Yasalonis and myself. Or, check the Garden Calendar in your local newspaper.

## HOLIDAY CACTUS

Three different cacti are grown as “Holiday” cacti (Figure 1) - *Schlumbergera truncata*, the Thanksgiving cactus; *Schlumbergera bridgesii*, the Christmas cactus; and *Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri*, the Easter cactus. Christmas cacti(b) have cladophylls, or joints, with two to three rounded teeth on the margin. Thanksgiving cacti(c) have joints with two to four teeth on the margin. Easter cacti(a) have joints with scalloped margins and bristles at the tips of the joints.

Don't be surprised if your Thanksgiving cactus is blooming right now. I have a Thanksgiving cactus that is in full bloom. Blooming depends to some extent on environmental conditions plus the care which the plant has received throughout the year.

Holiday cacti make excellent pot plants. Their



Figure 1. A) *Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri* (Easter cactus); B) *Schlumbergera bridgesii* (Christmas cactus); and C) *Schlumbergera truncata* (Thanksgiving cactus).

pendulous growth makes them perfect for hanging baskets. The flowers, which are irregular, range in color from fuchsia to reds to pinks to white. The segmented leaf-like stems provide a unique texture to the plant.

**Light** - Holiday cacti grow best in light shade. Indoor plants should be placed near a bright sunny window. Outdoors, plants should be placed under trees in filtered sun.

**Potting soil** - Potting soil for Holiday Cacti must be well-drained and porous. Some

potting mixtures which have been used successfully are: 3 parts peat moss and 1 part coarse builders sand, 2 parts peat moss and 1 part perlite, 1 part peat moss and 1 part vermiculite, and 2 parts peat moss, 2 parts orchid bark, and 1 part coarse builders sand or perlite.

**Fertilizer** - A soluble fertilizer should be applied every 10 to 30 days depending on light and rate of growth. The higher the light or the more rapidly the plant is growing the more frequent fertilizer can be applied. Water and fertilizer may be reduced from August to flowering, but after flowering and new growth starts it is very important to water and fertilizer regularly, because next year's flowers are formed on new growth.



**Watering** - Watering is important in producing healthy plants. Too little water or too much water will cause the plants to drop their flowers. The plants should be watered frequently, yet the soil should remain moist, but not wet. Good drainage is important.

**Propagation** - When flowers are pollinated, a seed pod will result. The seed pod is fleshy and turns a reddish color when ripe. To sow seeds, remove the black seeds from the fruit. Sow the seeds in a 50% peat - 50% vermiculate mix and keep warm and moist. Do not cover seed - simply press into soil mix. Sprouting may take one to three months.

The most common method of propagation is cuttings consisting of 2-3 cladophyllis (joints). Cuttings should be removed from the plant and placed about ½ inch deep in moist sand or potting soil. The use of a rooting powder or liquid is not essential, but will aid in root formation. Place cuttings in a warm, shaded location until rooted.

**Mealybug infestations** - The major pest of Schlumbergera is mealybugs. Slight infestations can be controlled by removing the

pest with a toothpick or tweezers. Another method would be to carefully wash the plant with soapy water using a soft brush or cloth. Chemicals can be used in extreme cases.

**Chlorosis** - The upper cladophylls (joints) may become chlorotic (yellowed), roughly in the center of the plant. The cause of this condition is not well known, but it is suspected that it is caused by low temperatures in late fall and early winter.

**Discoloration** - At times, portions of the cladophylls turn purple, blue, or gray green and are sometimes shriveled. This condition may be caused by root rot, but frequently result from soil with poor aeration or over-watering. Reduce the frequency of watering and improve soil aeration.

**Flower-bud drop** - Continued warm temperature above 90 degrees F. will cause some dropping of flower buds. Maintain temperature below 90 degrees F. Rapid changes in growing conditions (light, watering, temperature) can also cause bud drop.

**Disease** - Disease is not a major problem; however, over-watering may cause the development of rots. Therefore, it is important to use a well-drained media, a pot with drainage holes, and careful monitoring of soil moisture.

## **CREATING PRIVACY IN YOUR YARD** **by Anne Yasalonis,** **Florida Yards and Neighborhoods**

When speaking to people about their landscape concerns, the number one issue is creating privacy. Many people want to create a private area in their backyards or have views they wish to screen. A great way to create a screen or hedge is with plant material. Fences are often expensive, hard to install and can't do the same job an evergreen hedge can. The

following shrubs/trees make great hedges:

**Viburnum spp.** - Viburnums are a good choice for hedges, specimens or for screening objects from view. Sweet viburnum (*V. odoratissimum*) is a 25-foot tall by 10-15 foot wide evergreen shrub with large glossy leaves. Walter Viburnum (*V. obovatum*) is a Florida native that will grow to about 25 feet tall and 10 feet wide.

**Holly spp.** - Hollies make dense hedges so they are a great replacement for a fence. American holly will get up to 50 feet tall and 20 feet wide. 'Nellie Stevens' holly is a little smaller, maxing out at 20-30 feet tall and 10 feet wide. If you are looking for a large shrub, 'Burfordii' holly only gets to about 15 feet tall and wide. Hollies have glossy green foliage and red berries in the winter. Hollies range in size from a few feet to 60 feet tall, so be sure to choose the cultivar that will work best for your situation.

**Simpson's Stopper** - Simpson's Stopper (*Myrcianthes fragrans*) is a large evergreen shrub that will grow to be 20-30 feet tall and 15-20 feet wide. It makes a great privacy hedge and has showy berries and flowers that attract wildlife. Simpson's Stopper is a Florida native.

For more information on what plants to use to create privacy in your yard, go to <http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/shrubselect.htm>.

## PLANT BULBS NOW FOR SPRING GROWTH

Bulbous plants have thickened underground storage organs which enable them to survive unfavorable environmental conditions. Not all bulbous plants are true bulbs. Other specialized underground storage organs include corms, tubers, tuberous roots and rhizomes. However, we generally refer to all specialized storage organs as bulbs.

Bulbs do best in well drained soil that is high in organic matter. There are some bulbs that tolerate semi-shade, but most bulbs prefer plenty of sunlight.



Here in Florida we can grow many tropical and semi-tropical bulbs that only grow indoors further north. However, our climate is not suitable for many of the common bulbs of the northern states, including tulips, hyacinths, and some irises and lilies. These bulbs very often flower poorly or not all. However, with special care many of these bulbs will grow and bloom the first year. Recovering bulbs for planting the following year is not recommended since the bulbs rarely flower again.

Several varieties of small-flowering narcissus can be grown in Florida. The varieties paper white, Chinese sacred lily and pearl white lily can be grown outdoors or forced to flower indoors. Narcissus are usually planted from September to December. Most other varieties of narcissus, jonquils and daffodils will not bloom well in Florida except in the northernmost part of the state.

Crinums are well adapted to Florida and if planted in December or January, will produce flowers similar to the amaryllis in late spring and early summer.

The showy flowers of the amaryllis are favorites both in the garden and forced for indoor bloom. These bulbs come in many varieties and range in color from white to dark red and also come in striped varieties. Amaryllis should be planted from September through January.

Another excellent bulb for the home garden is the gladiolus. They are available in a wide variety of colors and will bloom about three months after planting. In central Florida they

should be planted in January or February.

The Easter lily is another spring flowering bulb which can be planted now for best results.

All bulbs should be planted at the recommended depth with points facing up. Firm the soil around and over bulbs and water. Applying several inches of mulch over the newly planted bulbs will help control weeds.

Should you desire to grow tulips or hyacinths, store them in the refrigerator for 60 days. Bulbs chilled in a refrigerator with ripening fruit may fail to bloom. The gas (ethylene) produced by ripening fruit can cause the flower buds to abort. Plant bulbs immediately upon removal from the refrigerator or they will not bloom well.

Bulbs can be used as perennial borders or along the edge of shrubbery. They are very effective when planted in beds for a mass of color. Bulbs can also provide cut flowers for the home.

### **MISC. DECEMBER GARDENING**

**Vegetables to plant** - beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, collards, horseradish, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, onions, peas, radicchio, radishes, spinach, Swiss chard and turnips.

**Herbs** - Anise, arugula, basil, bay, chives, cilantro, coriander, dill, fennel, garlic, lavender, mint, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, sweet marjoram, thyme and watercress.

**Flowers to plant** - Alyssum, baby's breath, begonia, bush daisy, calendula, candytuft, carnation, chrysanthemums, delphinium, dianthus, dusty miller, foxglove, geranium, goddetia, hollyhock, Iceland poppy, lobelia,

ornamental cabbage and kale, pansy, petunia, salvia, shasta daisy, snapdragon, statice, stock, sweet pea, verbena and viola.

**Brown patch in St. Augustine lawns** - This is a cool season disease which develops into large brown patches. The leaf blades turn yellow and are easily pulled from the sheath which is brown and rotten. Prevent this disease by making the last fertilizer application in October, using a slow release nitrogen fertilizer, and only watering when necessary. If the disease persists, apply a fungicide such as Immunox, Bayer Advanced Lawn Fungus Control or Ortho Lawn Fungus Control.



**Camellias** - Now is a good time to enjoy the fall and winter flowers of the camellia. The Sasanqua types, with flowers up to two inches in diameter, begin opening in late September and continue through December. Then, from December through early March, it is time for the japonica camellia blossoms to open. They are very showy and are 5 or more inches in diameter. Gardeners like to cut and float the large japonica blossoms in water as a table display.

Have a good gardening day,

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For Polk County Gardening Information and Horticultural Links:  
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