

POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

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Dear Reader,

The Master Gardener Calendars for 2006 are now ready for sale. For those of you who would like to order by mail, I have enclosed an order form. I have also enclosed a purge form which you must sign and return to the Extension Office, if you want to continue to receive the Urban Horticulturer Newsletter. Also, attached to the purge form is a short survey. You are not required to fill out the survey to continue to receive the Newsletter, however the information is very helpful to me when I plan future educational programs. By the way, the Master Gardeners have just received a new shipment of Melaleuca mulch. The price is still the same - \$2.50 per two cubic foot bag. Call the Extension Office for information. Thanks, David.

TREES AND SHRUBS

Trees and shrubs should be planted in the fall and winter months, instead of waiting until spring. The plants are dormant during this time and less apt to be injured by shock from planting. Also, the weather and moisture during this period are ideal for plant establishment, as well as good working weather for the gardener. Planting in the fall and winter allows the plants time to become established prior to spring growth and bloom, and prior to summer heat. Research shows that roots of a plant continue to grow and develop during the winter, even though the above ground part of the plant remains dormant. You will also find that nurseries have a good stock of plants

during the fall and winter.

Before going out and buying plants, study your site and have some idea what kind of plants would best fit your landscape needs. For example, if you need to shade your patio or a window on the west side of your home, look for a fast growing tree with a broad spreading canopy. Check reliable literature or ask the Extension Service about the growth requirements of the plants you plan to buy. Don't plant a crape myrtle cultivar, which has a potential to grow 40 feet, under a soffit or under utility wires.

Do the plants require special soil? Azaleas prefer acid soil so, don't plant azaleas up close to foundation of your home where there may be a residue of limestone. Do the plants have serious insect and disease problems which will require routine spraying like cycad scale on sago palms?

Be sure the plants are tolerant of your local weather conditions. Just because a plant, like hibiscus, can be found at most local garden centers does not mean it will routinely stand cold weather all over Polk County. Protected areas around lakes may be considerably warmer than low rural areas.



Inspect plants closely and don't purchase those with an unhealthy appearance or weak, poorly formed, scarred, or cracked branches. Don't purchase trees with double leaders or with main branches clustered together on the trunk. Leaves of abnormal size or with excessive yellowing are an indication of a plant health problem. Also,

examine plants for insects, diseases and mechanical damage.

After you have inspected the above ground portion of the plant, examine its root system. The root system of a container-grown plant should be well established so that the root ball stays intact when the container is removed; however, the plant should not be root-bound. Root-bound plants have a mass of roots circling near the outside surface of the container medium and may present difficulty in establishment in the landscape.

If the plant is root-bound or has many circling roots, you should slice the sides of the root ball with pruning shears or some sort of utility knife. Make 3-4 evenly spaced slices, each one going from the top to the bottom of the root ball 1-2 inches deep. Any circling roots that remain should be pulled away from the root ball. However, the best recommendation is to buy plants which are not root-bound.

Equally as important as selecting good plants is proper planting procedure. Dig the planting hole one foot wider and as deep as the root ball is tall. In some cases where the soil is hard or compacted, it may be advisable to dig a planting hole three times wider than the container and half as deep. Then mound the soil to cover the sides of the root ball. A plant installed in this manner might require more frequent irrigation during dry periods, but is not likely to suffer from sub-surface drainage problems.

Carefully remove the plant from the container. Gently place the plant in the hole and be sure the top of the root ball is no deeper than the existing landscape soil surface. Fill around the root ball with soil and gently firm the soil. Alternate adding water and soil to the planting hole to eliminate the possibility of air pockets. The common practice

of adding organic matter such as peat to the soil around the root ball is not recommended.

The success or failure of a planting often depends on whether the plants receive adequate moisture. Before planting, I like to soak the root ball in water in a bucket for 10-15 minutes or longer and also fill the planting hole with water and allow the water to soak into the ground. The construction of a saucer-like basin around the plant from the extra backfill soil will aid watering by holding irrigation and rainwater until it drains down into the plant's roots. Do not use excess soil to cover the top of the root ball, called capping, as this may prevent the root ball from receiving adequate moisture resulting in the plant's early death.

CITRUS PROBLEMS



Citrus canker - As many of you are aware, citrus canker has been found in several of the citrus growing areas of Florida. The disease is caused by a bacterium, *Xanthomonas axonopodis* pv. *citri*, and enters the plant tissue through wounds and natural openings. It attacks all citrus and some citrus relatives. Since the 2004 hurricanes, it has been found in several commercial groves in Polk County. So far, it has not been discovered in any homeowner trees.

The disease is highly contagious and spreads rapidly over short distances. Wind driven rain, overhead irrigation, flooding, insects, birds and humans can spread citrus canker. Many of the environmental factors, such as wind and rain, cannot be controlled. However, the spread by humans can be managed by preventing the transportation of infected plant material, which is the primary way the disease spreads over long

distances.

The symptoms on leaves and fruit typically are small, round, blister-like formations called lesions. As lesions on leaves age, they become brown with a water soaked margin, often surrounded by a yellow halo. On fruit, the lesions appear scab-like or corky. Infections may cause severe effects, including defoliation, twig dieback, severely blemished fruit, reduced fruit quality and premature fruit drop.

Historically, citrus canker has been controlled in Florida through eradication programs. So, if canker was found on one of your citrus trees, the state will destroy your tree and all other trees within a 1900 feet radius. Homeowners who lose citrus trees from their yards are currently eligible for a \$100 dollar voucher that can be used to buy non-citrus trees, bushes, shrubs, or other garden items. As you probably know, the State is inspecting homeowner and commercial groves for citrus canker on a regular basis. Probably some of you have the little plastic label on one of your trees designating it as a Sentinel Tree - one which they inspect every few weeks.

Citrus greening - As if citrus canker is not enough, home citrus growers as well as commercial growers are facing a new disease called citrus greening (also called yellow dragon disease) which infects most citrus species, hybrids, as well as some citrus relatives. This disease is caused by a bacterium-like organism and is spread by a tiny little insect called the Asian citrus psyllid as well as by grafting, dodder (a plant parasite) and possibly seed. It is not spread by casual contamination of people and tools or by wind and rain like citrus canker. Citrus greening is considered to be the worst disease of citrus in the world.

Until recently, neither the disease nor the insect



vector were present in Florida. The citrus greening vector, the Asian psyllid, was first discovered in Palm Beach County in 1998 and has since spread over most of the State. This insect is now present on many citrus trees in Polk County. The greening disease was found in Homestead, Florida in August of 2005. So, the disease and the prime method of transmission, the Asian psyllid, are now present in Florida. So far however, the disease has been isolated in south Florida. If it reaches central Florida, it could pose a worse threat than citrus canker to growers and homeowners.

Citrus canker is kind of a debilitating disease which does not kill the tree and could be treated with cooper, if it became an endemic problem in citrus growing areas. Citrus greening, on the other hand, will kill a tree in six years or so, during which time the tree does not produce any quality fruit. Control strategies are being discussed. So far only the insect, without the disease, occurs in Polk County. We hope it stays that way!! Call the Extension Office for more information.

PLANTING A BUTTERFLY GARDEN

**by Anne Yasalonis, Florida Yards and
Neighborhoods Coordinator**

A butterfly garden is an easy way to enjoy wildlife in your own back yard. Many of the plants are readily available, easy to maintain and drought tolerant. If you are just starting out, there are a few things you need to know.



Two important things to remember when starting a butterfly garden are to provide food for both the larvae and the adult butterflies. The larval plants will be devoured by the hungry caterpillars and many times will be left without any leaves, so

don't worry if you start to see plants without leaves. The nectar plants for the adults will not be chewed as the adults feed on the nectar in the flowers. It is important to have both of these food sources so that the butterflies will live and reproduce in your garden.

Another important thing to remember when planting a butterfly garden is to abstain from using pesticides. Use natural predators or remove the pests you find by hand.

You may also want to provide a puddling station for your butterflies to drink from. It can be made using a saucer, layering sand, compost and finally small stones on top. Fill the saucer with water and make sure the stones are not covered with water. The butterflies will land on the stones and drink the water from the spore spaces. For larval and adult butterfly plants for central Florida, check the "Feature Articles" section of the Web Site <http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu>.

MISC. OCTOBER GARDENING

Vegetables to plant - beet, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, celery, collards, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, onion, peas, potato, radicchio, radish, rhubarb, roquette, rutabaga, spinach, strawberry, Swiss chard and turnip.

Herbs to plant - anise, basil, bay laurel, borage, cardamom, chervil, chives, coriander, dill, fennel, garlic, lavender, lemon balm, lovage, mint, nasturtium, oregano, rosemary, sage, sweet marjoram, tarragon, thyme and water cress.

Flowers to plant - African daisy, alyssum, angelonia, ageratum, begonia, black-eyed Susan, blue daze, calendula, candytuft, celosia, chrysanthemum, cleome, coleus, cornflower, cosmos, dianthus, dusty miller, gaillardia, gazania,

geranium, gerbera, heliotrope, hollyhock, impatiens, larkspur, lobelia, nicotiana, pentas, petunia, salvia, snapdragon, sunflower, sweet pea, verbena and zinnia.

Citrus - Make your last fertilizer application of the year. Apply one pound of a 6-6-6 citrus fertilizer per year of tree age up to 8 years old. Evenly apply the fertilizer under the drip-line of the tree starting 6-8 inches from the trunk. Avoid using fertilizer spikes.

Fertilizer - This is a good time to fertilize landscape plants that have been stressed by a long hot summer. Choose a fertilizer recommended for shrubs and perennials. Apply about 1 pound nitrogen per 1000 square feet - 7.5 pounds of a 13% nitrogen fertilizer per 1000 square feet. Look on the fertilizer analysis and choose products which have slow release nitrogen or as it is often called, water insoluble nitrogen. This nitrogen source releases slowly into the soil.

Have a good gardening day,

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

Polk County Web Site
<http://polk.ifas.ufl.edu>

